THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE

EDITED BY
Rev. E. HASTINGS, M.A.

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SPEAKER'S BIBLE

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The aim of THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE is to preserve all that is worth preserving of the modern interpretation of the Bible. It is the thought rather than the expression that is retained, though the expression has not been rejected when it seemed worthy. So much, however, has been done in the way of condensing, rearranging, re-writing, adding to, and illustrating, that the sources have not as a rule been given. But so far as these are published sermons, they will be found in the Index to Modern Sermons which accompanies each volume. THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE contains also much that is new, written by the Editor and others.

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THE SPEAKER'S BIBLE

THE BOOK OF HOSEA

INTRODUCTION

1. To the modern reader Hosea is one of the most attractive, and yet one of the most difficult of the prophets—attractive because of the human story which underlies the book, and wins our poignant interest and sympathy, and difficult because the story is told in so remote and allusive a fashion, and because the prophecies which are linked with it are broken and disjointed, controlled by emotion rather than by any principle of logical order. In dealing with these difficulties, our first need is to remember that the Hebrew prophets were not writers of books but spokesmen of Divine oracles. They felt themselves to be the living link between Yahweh, the God of Israel, and His people. Their own moral consciousness led them to condemn in the most vigorous terms the morality and religion of their times. Their conviction that they had been admitted to the council of Yahweh and knew His mind led them to interpret past and present history as effectively controlled by God according to a Divine purpose. The psychological outlook of their age and race led them to the rhythmic utterance of the Divine 'word' which expressed this interpretation, an utterance usually associated with exalted or abnormal states of consciousness, which were regarded as the psychic seal of their inspiration and of the truth of their message. The literary results of this experience, for the most part remembered and gathered by their disciples rather than by themselves, reveal this fragmentary and piecemeal origin, in spite of the attempts of collectors and editors to shape the oracles into an orderly sequence.

2. In Hosea's time—the middle of the eighth century B.C.—the Northern kingdom of Israel, to which he himself belonged and in which he prophesied, was passing from prosperity to adversity. A century before it had had to pay tribute to the overshadowing empire of Assyria, but, under Jeroboam II. (782–743), Israel had been able to expand its territories, increase its wealth, and enjoy its life. The picture of that life which we get from Hosea, and from his slightly earlier contemporary Amos, is of a people exultant in their prosperity, zealous in their religious ceremonies, and careless of their moral obligations. To these prophets, as to Isaiah and Micah (their successors in the Southern kingdom of Judah), it seemed that the worship of the many altars on the high places of the land added insult to the injury done to Yahweh by the unrighteous treatment of fellow-Israelites. Yahweh desired mercy rather than sacrifice, and the penalty of Israel's misconduct would be the suffering wrought by foreign (Assyrian) invasion, and by the subsequent exile. History justified Amos and Hosea. After the long reign of Jeroboam II. half a dozen kings of Israel flit like shadows across the stage of the Northern kingdom within a score of years—puppets in the hands of Assyria, or impotent rebels against Assyria's invincible might. Some of the obscure sayings of Hosea doubtless refer to these troublous times of battle, murder, and sudden death. The end came with the fall of Samaria in 722, after a three years' siege by the Assyrians.

3. It is, however, with the religious, more than with the political, conditions that Hosea was directly concerned, though his condemnation of the kings, and of the kingship in general, is unmistakable. His personal fortunes may have been intimately concerned in those religious conditions. The worship of Yahweh at that time was offered at the 'high places' throughout the land, and was not yet centralized at Jerusalem. A century before Hosea, the issue faced by Elijah had been whether the worshippers of Yahweh could also worship the Tyrian Baal of Jezebel's court. Now, the issue was whether the baalized worship of Yahweh was really acceptable to Him. It was a thinly disguised Nature-worship, learnt from the Canaanites, whose cult Israel had appropriated

together with their high places. Its essential character was not altered when it was transferred to Yahweh, but *His* character was, and He was no longer the desert-God of a stern, if primitive, morality. Little wonder that the Puritan Rechabites would have nothing to do with the whole civilization that flowered in such a religion. Yahweh, the vindicator of social duty and the saviour-God from Egypt, had become the localized giver of fertility, to whom the orgies of sexual passion were the most congenial form of worship. The practice of 'sacred' prostitution at the sanctuaries is to us incomprehensible as part of the worship of the God of Israel, but there it was, as Hosea seems to have known to his cost. His bitter denunciation of the practice, and of the priests who officially countenanced it, may have derived its intensity from the degradation of his own wife through such rites. The most plausible reconstruction of his personal story (told us in the narrative of chap. i. and in the autobiographical fragment of chap. iii.) is as follows:—

Hosea married Gomer bath Diblaim in the ordinary way, without any foreknowledge of the fortunes of his marriage. Within the next few years three children were born to him. At some point in this domestic history which we cannot fix (possibly between the births of the first and second child, as the names may indicate), Gomer became unfaithful to Hosea, perhaps through association with the sacred prostitution of the sanctuaries. At all events, a later stage of the story (iii.) shows us Gomer separated from her husband, and in the kind of position that a temple-prostitute might occupy. Hosea buys her back at a slave's price, and arranges for her welfare with a view to her subsequent return to him. His prophetic consciousness leads him to interpret the whole experience as a realistic symbol of the religious relation between Yahweh and Israel; the events are something that had to be, in order that Israel's history might be rightly interpreted and Yahweh's nature and purpose better known. Such realism of interpretation is paralleled by the prophetic use of symbolic acts (*e.g.* Isa. xx.); the nearest parallel to Hosea's interpretation of his own marriage is Ezekiel's interpretation of his wife's death (xxiv. 15–24). The result of this view, remote from our way of looking at life, is that the whole story is set down as something predestined: 'Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredom and children of whoredom' (Hosea i. 2). The actual events of the personal story thus pass into an allegory of Yahweh and Israel. The bitter sorrow brought to Yahweh by Israel's disloyalty, and the eager affection that seeks to win Israel back to a true and lasting penitence, are painted in colours from the palette of personal experience. Again and again throughout the subsequent oracles (more particularly in the second chapter now separating the two parts of the personal narrative) the same metaphor is used, a metaphor destined to play a great part in the vocabulary of religion. There was, of course, nothing new in the idea of the marriage of a god to his people; the new thing was the interpretation given to the idea, the fact that a prophet of Israel moralized that relation, and filled it with the intensity of his own sorrow and love.

4. As we read the collection of short prophecies which are attached to this personal story, we must remember that the metaphor was doubly intensified by actual experience—on the one hand that of the prophet himself, and on the other hand that of the sexual practices of the sanctuaries, by which a peculiar intensity was given to worship. The people and the prophet lived on different planes, yet both conceived a religious relation on the basis of a sexual relation, a religious relation of Israel with Yahweh. (We may usefully compare the equally striking and related contrast drawn by St Paul in 1. Cor. vi. 15–17.) But how different is the Yahweh of popular religion from the Yahweh of the prophet's mind and heart! The consciousness of this difference gives the passion to the prophet's tones as he denounces that false religion, so appropriately linked with actual immorality, and stigmatizes it as marital disloyalty to the true Yahweh, just because it is marital loyalty to a baalized Yahweh. In the second chapter, where, as has been said, the metaphor is most fully developed, the nation is described as a prostitute with many lovers, whose children are illegitimate. The lovers are the Baals of the different sanctuaries, through which the people believe that they are worshipping Yahweh; but this the prophet refuses to admit, and in fact demands that the very name 'Baal' shall be dropped in relation to Yahweh (ii. 16, 17). The products of the fertile land are regarded by Israel as the reward of her

worship—that is, for the prophet, the price of her prostitution—whereas they are really the gifts of Yahweh, the true husband of Israel. What then can Yahweh do but withdraw His gifts, lay waste the land, and bring Israel back to the discipline of the desert? What else can renew the loyalty of Israel's youth, and bring a new betrothal and a renewal of the gifts? Then shall the ill-omened names of the prophet's children be transformed into tokens of an abiding covenant-love and provision.

5. It would not be easy to make the separate oracles which follow (iv.–xiv.) very intelligible in all their details, even with the space required for a full commentary. These oracles probably belong to different times and occasions, and there are no headlines to tell us when we pass from one to another, and no footnotes to explain the obscure allusions to current events. We must be content here to notice the principal themes of the successive paragraphs of the Revised Version. In iv. 1–19, which describes the violence and bloodshed, the thefts and dishonesties, of Hosea's generation, we should note how all this immorality is traced back to the *spirit* of irreligion (iv. 12; *cf.* v. 4), and how the priests are blamed as primarily responsible for this. What wonder is it that the daughters of Israel yield to the call of sexual passion in ordinary life, when the religion itself sets the seal of approval upon it in the sanctuary? It is the priests and rulers of Israel who have misled the people, so that the very sanctuaries have become snares (v. 1–7). What can be expected but the disaster of invasion, as the just penalty inflicted by an angry God? (v. 8–15). Yet the superficial penitence (vi. 1–3) that invokes God merely to escape from disaster is not enough; the sin lies too deep for such easy treatment (vi. 4–11; note, again, the inwardness of Hosea's teaching, which links it with that of the Sermon on the Mount). Kings and people wickedly waste their strength and plan their futile policies (vii.), but idol-altars and fortressed cities will not avail against the vengeance of Yahweh (viii.; note that Hosea is the first to attack the use of images in the worship of Yahweh). The days of visitation are at hand, and Israel shall become wanderers among the nations (ix.). Again and again the prophet denounces the many altars of Israel, that do but await the time of their ruin, when the thorn and the thistle shall grow upon them—a fitting harvest of the seed of wrongdoing which has been sown there (x.). In chap. xi. Hosea uses a new metaphor, that of the father and the son, and describes with touching sympathy the gracious dealing of Yahweh by which He first taught Israel as a little child to walk, and carried the tired child upon His arm; how can He give up to destruction the child in which so much of Himself is invested? 'How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I surrender thee, Israel?' (xi. 8). Cannot Israel learn from the persistence of the ancestral Jacob to be faithful to Yahweh—the saviour-God from the land of Egypt, who has revealed His will by prophets? (xi. 12–xii. 14, *cf.* xiii. 4). How ungrateful is Israel in forgetting the redemptive work of Yahweh in history, and in turning to the folly of idolatry! (xiii.). Yet, even now, let Israel return to Yahweh with a true and deep, instead of a false and superficial, repentance, that she may learn how gracious the Lord is; let her turn from idols to the living God, who is the source of all life and blessing (xiv.).

6. Notwithstanding, therefore, the obscurities of meaning in many details (partly due to an unusually corrupt Hebrew text in certain passages), the depth and beauty of Hosea's message will be apparent to every thoughtful reader of the book. He is not, like Amos, a preacher of judgment only (for Amos ix. 11–15 is a later addition to that book); he is an evangelist who expects repentance and promises forgiveness. Whether Gomer was won back to a permanent loyalty towards her husband we do not know; but his expectation of this becomes an integral part of the attitude of Yahweh towards Israel, as the prophet construes it. Moreover, the Divine forgiveness is no mere word that costs God nothing; it springs from the sorrowing and suffering heart of God, who cannot help loving His sinful children and His faithless spouse. Hosea thus gives no support to the later Greek doctrine that God knows no suffering, for the prophet knew from his own experience the inevitable cost of a forgiveness that seeks and saves, as every complete forgiveness must do (see on this point H. R. Mackintosh, *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness*, pp. 185 ff.). We may speak without any exaggeration of 'The Cross of Hosea,' and find in his own suffering transformed by love a true anticipation of

the greater Cross of Christ. It is indeed along such lines as these that we can most usefully and accurately trace the continuity of the New Testament with the Old. These Hebrew prophets opened up great lines of thought concerning God, which were suggested by their own experience, and their experience became the vehicle of revelation just because it was so real to them, so true a part of their own human life. Suffering and sorrow by themselves can do nothing; they are evils from which man will always shrink, as instinctively as Jesus shrank from the Cross. But suffering and sorrow can be transformed by man's attitude towards them, and gladly accepted for their new meaning; then they can lift men into that fellowship with God which is the only path to the hidden realms of Divine truth. It was the consciousness of being a prophet of Yahweh that baptized Hosea's personal sorrow into a new purpose, and gave it a new meaning. He realized in his own life something of the Divine nature, and that realization of it became the revelation which he made articulate in his oracles of God. Does this not suggest to us one great and true way of approach to the understanding of the Cross of Christ? That Cross reveals because it realizes. The intense reality of the human experience of Jesus has already entered into the Divine truth of things, and needs no arbitrary assignment of values to make it both a realization and a revelation of the Divine. As Horace Bushnell put it, 'there is a cross in God before the wood is seen upon Calvary; hid in God's own virtue itself, struggling on heavily in burdened feeling through all the previous ages, and struggling as heavily now even in the throne of the worlds.'[1]

7. We have seen that Hosea employs two metaphors from the life of the family to express his deepest conceptions of Yahweh's relation to Israel, viz., that of the Father and that of the Husband, though his emphasis falls overwhelmingly on the latter. The place given to the Fatherhood of God in the teaching of Jesus, to whom the life of the family meant so much (and never more than when He bade men forsake even that for God's sake), has given to the metaphor of Fatherhood a central place in Christian thought and doctrine, whilst that of the Divine Husband, however frequent in mystical devotion, has hardly entered seriously into Christian *theology* at all. St Paul, indeed, used the metaphor of the mystical relation of Christ and the Church (Eph. v. 23). In both Jewish and Christian exegesis the metaphor has profoundly affected the interpretation of that anthology of love poems which we know as 'The Song of Songs,' and indeed secured for it a place in the Canon of Scripture. But no Christian theologian seems ever to have interpreted the mystery of the Godhead by the metaphor of Husbandhood. It is, of course, perfectly natural, even apart from the authority of Jesus, that the metaphor of the Divine Father should have held the field, for it seems inherently more fitted to describe the relation of God to man, and is much less open to abuse and misconception. Yet Hosea's predominant use of the metaphor of Husband, which is by no means confined to him in the Old Testament (see *e.g.* Isa. liv. 1–8; Ezek. xvi. 8) may usefully remind us that *both* terms, Father and Husband, are metaphors. When we remember how many speculative reconstructions of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity have merely worked out the human metaphor of Fatherhood, it is well to remember that other metaphors, such as that of the term Husband, have Scriptural sanction, and that no human metaphor has ontological value in its own right. Whatever the perils of the metaphor of marriage as applied to God's relation to man—and the excesses of the vocabulary of mystical devotion have often illustrated them—it remains true that Hosea's use of it is a real consecration of human love, and a real elucidation of the Divine. The suggestiveness of the metaphor in later Jewish thought may be illustrated by a parable from the Talmud:

> 'There was once a man who betrothed himself to a beautiful maiden and then went away, and the maiden waited and waited and he came not. Friends and rivals mocked her, and said, "He will never come." She went into her room, and took out the letters in which he had promised to be ever faithful. Weeping she read them and was comforted. In time he returned, and enquiring how she had kept faith so long, she showed him his letters. Israel in misery, in captivity, was mocked by the nations for her hopes of redemption; but Israel went into her schools and synagogues and took out the letters and was comforted. God would in time redeem

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[1] *The Vicarious Sacrifice*, p. 35.

her, and say, "How could you alone among all the mocking nations be faithful?" Then Israel would point to the law and answer, "Had I not your promise here?"'[1]

The use by Hosea may be compared with the fine thought in the painting of the Arnolfinis by Jan van Eyck; the married pair standing hand in hand are reflected in a mirror, the frame of which is a ring of tiny pictures representing the Lord's passion. So human love is made sacramental by being set in the framework of the Divine; so is effectively proclaimed the essential kinship of the spiritual values in man with their eternal realization in God.

8. It will be seen how impossible it was for a prophet of such inwardness of emphasis to be content with the representation of Yahweh by the 'calves' (*i.e.* the bull-images) which associated Him with Nature-worship, or even to be content with external ceremonial at all, taken for its own sake. Yet it would be wrong to conclude, as some have done, that 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice' implies the rejection of all religious rites in favour of a wholly 'spiritual' religion. Hosea and other prophets (*e.g.* Amos and Isaiah) denounced particular *forms* of current worship as unworthy of God, and certainly opposed the substitution of ceremonial zeal for that moral conduct which was Yahweh's supreme desire. But this is not to say that these prophets conceived the possibility of a religion without rites and ceremonies at all. This would not be true of Jesus Himself, when He quotes the saying of Hosea, or when He speaks of a true and spiritual worship to be rendered neither in Samaria nor in Jerusalem. The great issue in regard to all rites of worship is as to where the emphasis falls. Is the particular act regarded as essential, and does it tend to replace the spirit and performance of moral obligations? Or is the external act an expression of that inner spirit, in which all can join, and by which that spirit is inspired and nurtured? Is the external act judged by its continued fitness to this end, as Hosea here judges the worship of images? We are certainly not warranted in supposing that Hosea would have denounced the ceremonial of post-exilic Judaism as in itself wrong, even though he might still have found matter for criticism in its details or even its emphasis. We have to remember that, side by side with the formulation of the laws of worship as we have them, for example, in Leviticus, there is a more or less contemporary formulation of the principles of spiritual religion as experienced within, which we have in the Psalms. The two developments are not rivals, but different aspects of the religious life of the same people; the Psalms articulated the spirit of the ritual, and the ritual embodied the needs and aspirations of the Psalms. Indeed, the first canonical law-book, the Book of Deuteronomy, which took shape in the century following Hosea's work, is strongly marked by his spirit, and shows frequent signs of his influence, both in its purification of worship and in its general humanitarianism. It is, however, in Hosea's like-minded successor, Jeremiah, that we may see his spirit most clearly continued. Through Jeremiah and the abiding spiritual nucleus of 'them that feared Yahweh' (Mal. iii. 16), we may trace the Hoseanic succession down to the disciples of Jesus and the primitive Christian Church.

9. Hosea is rich in sayings that are memorable, sayings that have taken a classic place in the language of the Christian religion. The terms of the lasting betrothal in righteousness (ii. 19, 20) are better known than the fine thought that immediately follows, the thought of Yahweh hearing the cry of the thirsty land and answering it in the rain from heaven, according to that sequence of Nature's working which He controls. 'Like people, like priest' (iv. 9) has become proverbial, as also has 'Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone' (iv. 17). The penitential confession of vi. 1–3 ('Come and let us return unto the Lord') has entered into hymn and prayer, but in a serious, and not (as there given) in a superficial sense. The figures of evanescent goodness—the morning cloud and the dew that goeth early away—are full of beauty and pathetic suggestiveness (vi. 4; *cf.* xiii. 3). We have already noted the great central saying of vi. 6: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' There are vigorous figures of Ephraim as a half-baked cake, or as a man already sprinkled with gray hairs, and not realizing that the strength of his youth is passing away (vii. 8, 9). Another proverb is that of 'sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind' (viii. 7). One of the best-known verses is x. 12, 'Sow to yourselves in righteousness,' etc. The

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[1] Emanuel Deutsch, *The Talmud*, 102, 103.

passage about death and the grave (xiii. 14), to which St Paul gave so noble a setting (1 Cor. xv. 55), is really in the form of a question—'Shall I ransom, shall I redeem?'—and is shown by its context to be a threat, not a promise. The closing chapter of the book is one of exceeding beauty, and might be called a preacher's programme. It begins with invitation, appeals to the discipline of experience, makes articulate the inarticulate cry of the heart, calls for the renunciation of false helps, in order that man may come to know the fatherly compassions of God, since 'nothing but the infinite pity is sufficient for the infinite pathos of human life' (J. H. Shorthouse). Through that compassion new life will be given, life with the beauty of the lily and the strength of the cedar. The book closes (except for the scribal note in xiv. 9) with a dialogue between God and man in which the ultimate relation of life and religion finds expression in the words, 'From me is thy fruit found.'

H. Wheeler Robinson

The Gospel of Hosea

Hos. i. 1.—'The word of the Lord that came unto Hosea.'

Hos. xi. 9.—'For I am God, and not man.'

1. In the whole gallery of Old Testament portraits there is no more fascinating figure than that of the prophet of Divine and human love. If he had not been an inspired teacher, Hosea might have been a great lyric poet. One of the first, he was also one of the noblest, of the not very large family of the mystics who dared to make their own thoughts, feelings, and actions the norm of Divinity. If we are to understand such mysticism as theirs we must begin by doing justice to that fine Hebrew saying, 'The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord.' With Plato and Plotinus the Hebrew and the Christian mystic take the things of time and sense for mirrors or symbols of eternal heavenly realities, and they can no more doubt their intuitions of God than they can doubt their own existence. It is true that even the purest human mind has never—except once—been an absolutely perfect medium for the transmission of the white radiance of eternity; and few confessions are more pathetic than that of Savonarola, the prophet-mystic of Florence, 'I count as nothing: darkness encompasses me: *yet the light I saw was the light from heaven.*' No doubt it was; and this inward illumination is the distinction of the true mystic.

It is characteristic of the mystic that he does not need to stray from home in quest of the Divine secret. Hosea received his message neither in the solitude of the desert nor in the society of other prophets. Rather the truth met him at his own threshold, revealed herself to him there, and summoned him thence to his life-work. Other prophets might come down from the mountains or up from the wilderness to thunder the word of the Lord in the ear of the nation, but there is no indication that Hosea ever wandered from the valleys and meadows, the orchards and vineyards, of his much-loved Ephraim. There never was a truer patriot. The concentration of his thoughts is evidenced by the fact that while Ephraim is always on his lips he never once names Jerusalem, and all the references to Judah seem to be interpolations made by the Judean hands through which his work has passed. Too individual and original to owe much to other minds, he never affected the manners or felt the contagious influence of 'the sons of the prophets,' probably never wore the picturesque prophetic mantle of dark haircloth, and never had any connection with the guilds of prophets who led a wandering life and fanned each other's religious enthusiasm with the breath of music and song. Nor was he conscious of any temperamental affinity with the fanatical Nazirites and Rechabites—true descendants of the desert Bedawîn—who had a quarrel with civilization as such; for how could he doubt that 'the corn, wine and oil, the silver and gold' were gifts of God? He was rather a man of the people, attempting, in an age of material splendour and spiritual decay, to live a common life well. Sensitive, poetic, imaginative, pensive, with far more than an ordinary capacity alike for joy and sorrow, he was intensely alive to the quiet beauty of Nature, the peacefulness of home, the sanctities and fidelities of love. With such a common life he would have been well content. But God had other thoughts regarding him, and higher work for him to do, calling him to be one of the greatest religious teachers the world has ever seen.

True mystic that he was, Hosea recognized that his gospel was inseparable from his personality. Had he not felt that some indication of the development of his mind was an essential part of his message, he would never have written his poignant prelude. He perceived that the doctrine could not be understood without the personal illustration; the Divine archetype was to be seen only through the human type. There is an apparent egoism in the mystic which is compatible with a very real and profound humility. Indeed, his task of speaking of himself is sometimes the heaviest of crosses. Hosea would never have given his *confessio amantis* to a cold and critical world if he had not felt himself in the grip of an overmastering necessity. Wild horses would never have dragged the tale from him, but the hand of the Lord was upon him, and he could not choose but speak. With touching reserve, in a quiet historical style which is yet tremulous with feeling and infinitely more moving than floods of impassioned rhetoric, he tells the story of his heart, not because he wishes to attract any attention to himself, but because he has so much to say to the Sacred Heart which beats at the centre of all things. Through an outer portal he will lead us into the temple's inner shrine. He has found that the Divine and the human secret of existence are one; they have both revealed themselves to him at the flaming core of an ordinary life.

2. There were two days of Hosea's life in which the gates of reality finally opened to him. The one was the day in which he declared his love, the other the day in which he was disillusioned. It was the second of these days—when his Eden was withered, and naught remained but 'bare ruined quires where late the sweet birds sang'; when his temple was in ruins, the shrine empty, the holy of holies desecrated—that really tested him. The ordeal to such a nature as his was the severest imaginable, the pain too exquisite for words, the sense of wrong too deep for tears. From this test how did he emerge? How did he take up the task of life again? Did he merely laugh a bitter laugh and turn to seek other pleasures? Did he live to write a dreary little *Vanitas Vanitatum*? Did he anticipate the cynic of his race who set his seal to the insulting dictum, 'One type of manhood among a thousand have I found, but an ideal of womanhood among all these have I not found'?

If that had been the end of it we should never have heard of him and his story. He would have had no gospel for Israel and mankind. But when the first anguish of disillusionment was past, he came out of the depths not merely with the peace of an accepted sorrow, but with the awakened consciousness that 'love is not love which alters when it alteration finds. . . . It hath the quality of everlastingness.' Therefore we find him ordering all the rest of his days on the calm assumption that love must triumph. We see him always in the attitude of intensely eager, but perfectly assured, waiting. We watch his love bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things, and never failing. It is patient because eternal. Just when it appears to have received its death-blow it proves itself to be deathless, a truth which is the burden of perhaps the finest sonnet in the English language:

Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,
  When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies,
When Faith is kneeling at his bed of death
  And Innocence is closing up his eyes,
Now if thou would'st, when all have given him over,
From death to life thou might'st him yet recover.

3. Now, as is the man, such is his gospel. There never was a clearer illustration of the principle that the heart makes the theologian. With the uttermost daring of a simple faith, Hosea makes his own mind an index of the Mind of Deity. It is true he might have done the same if he had been hard and unforgiving; he might have done the same if he had determined simply to be just. But in that case he would have had no gospel, he would simply have been one more stern censor of sin and preacher of righteousness. It was his conduct in the supreme moral crisis of his life that made his mind like a sensitized plate ready to receive a new image of God. His own forgiving pity won for him a sudden vision of the great Heart of the Eternal. From that hour he knew that inextinguishable in the bosom of God burns the original uncreated flame of love, of which all other love is the emanation and reflexion. And he knew that the norm of Divinity is not man's all too prevalent inhumanity to his fellow-man, but man's nobility in those rare

moments when he rises completely above himself into the atmosphere of another and a better world. The revelation probably astonished no one more than the prophet himself. Immediately he began to wonder if he had ever till then really known God at all. How blind and dull and stupid he had been! He had never realized what heights and depths of patient goodness there are in the Divine nature. He had never *sympathized* with Israel's God, whose holy love had been so long and so cruelly requited with ingratitude and infidelity. The new revelation, bursting upon his mind and opening his lips, made him a prophet. His gospel clothed itself in great words, which were not the fruit of the toiling intellect, but the gift of eternal love. And as for his own private sorrow, it was all but completely swallowed up in the joy of the apocalypse of Divine grace; so much so that, with another act of incredible daring, another intuition of childlike faith, he declares that even *that* marriage was, after all, made in heaven.

4. Thus for the first time in history it dawned upon the human mind that God's sovereign attribute in heaven and in earth is His loving-kindness. The words almost tremble on the prophet's lips—though it was reserved for an apostle to utter them—that 'God is love.' Later seers and poets would express the truth in many other noble and beautiful forms, but there is a mingling of burning passion and melting pathos in Hosea's primitive Hebrew gospel—his protevangelium—which makes it for ever memorable:

How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?
How shall I deliver thee, Israel?
How shall I make thee as Admah?
How shall I set thee as Zeboim?
My heart is turned within me,
All my sympathies are all aglow.
I will not execute the fierceness of my anger,
I will not turn to destroy Ephraim:
For I am God, and not man.

For the first time it is seen that the real and fundamental difference between God and man is not His almightiness appalling our impotence, His greatness dwarfing our littleness, His omniscience amazing our ignorance, but His love shaming our lovelessness. That is the quintessence of Deity.

There is a prevalent notion that men like Hosea, the Old Testament prophet of love, and John, the New Testament apostle of love, are soft emotionalists, with no iron in their blood, no rigour in their gospel. There could be no greater mistake. Hosea's passion for righteousness is even more vehement than that of Amos. As the spiritual physician of Israel, faithfully diagnosing her moral and social diseases, he does not hesitate to announce that desperate remedies are needed. But his last word can never be judgment or death or destruction. He knows that God smites in order to save, cuts deep in order to heal. His distinctive and dominant conception—his inevitable word—is 'love' (*hesed*), which sums up both his religion and his ethics.

For how many thousands, or millions, of years had the living God been waiting for some mind to mirror and reveal His true nature to man! How patiently He had carried on 'the education of the human race,' always with this end in view, and always realizing that a lesson is never taught until it is learned! Hosea, with a heart purified and a mind illuminated by suffering, is the first to penetrate God's open secret, that the deepest essence of Being is an inalienable love which cannot rest until it has redeemed the captive and saved the lost. Henceforth the Dweller in the Innermost, though unseen, will not be unknown.

¶ 'When we consider,' says Professor Cornill, 'that all this was absolutely new, that those thoughts in which humanity has been educated and which have consoled it for 3000 years were all first spoken by Hosea, we must reckon him among the greatest religious geniuses which the world has ever produced. . . . That this man, so apparently a man of emotion, governed entirely by his moods, and driven helplessly hither and thither by them, should have possessed a formal theological system, which has exercised an immeasurable influence on future generations, is a phenomenon of no slight significance. . . . But it is not too much to say that the entire faith and theology of later Israel grew out of Hosea, that all its characteristic views and ideas are to be first found in his book.'

Rapt into intense communion with God, till his eyes are opened to catch glimpses of eternal realities, the prophet reports his experience. And this is what the Revealer says in human speech: 'I will not forsake, I will not destroy, I will love and redeem: for I am God, and not man.' That was the gospel to Israel. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends'—that is the gospel given to all mankind by Him who 'seemeth human and divine, the highest, holiest manhood'; who is not come to destroy, but to save, for He is God *and* man, in one person, for ever.

The Discipline of the Wilderness

Hos. ii. 14.—'Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her.'

It was God Himself who led His people into the wilderness. And it became the inspiring hope of the prophet that the Divine Voice should reach the people's heart there; that the nation should recover the buoyancy of her youth; that the gratitude and confidence of the great days of deliverance should be restored—these were the prophet's desires for his people, and they had grown out of his own experiences of the wondrous ways of God. The man laid bare his own soul, and translated it into a gospel for Israel. As George Adam Smith puts it, his grief became his gospel. He had been led into the wilderness, and God had spoken comfortably to him, given him vineyards where he had looked for a desert, and songs of victory where he expected lamentation and death; and now he finds in those experiences the material and motive of his evangel. So he cries: 'Let not your heart be troubled. God is your Leader; He has taken you out of your prosperities and given you these hungers, these achings for something better and greater, and He will bring you at length into the full enjoyment of His revelation.' It is the utterance of one man's experience, but it is the one great gospel written right away through the experience of men.

For the Christian there is a benediction in the wilderness. Let him accept it, if it comes to him, as coming from the hand of God; let him look upon it with all its desolation as part of the outworking of some eternal purpose; let him seek in his solitude to learn the discipline of the Father—a discipline of love—and it will not be long before the meaning of God grows more luminous and the benediction of loneliness pours its balm into his forlorn and solitary spirit.

1. It may be that the solitude of the wilderness is necessary *to open our ears to the voice of God.* In the rush of city life it is difficult to detach ourselves, but in the desert all that perpetual hum has died away. We are no longer mixed up with other people's opinions and ideas, and so we are more fitted to catch the accents of God. How often the desert has been the training-ground of the saints. Moses was far away in the lonely recesses of Horeb when God gave him his great commission. It was when he was alone in the mountain cave that the still, small voice came to Elijah. And Daniel tells us that when the vision of God was given to him he had been deserted by all his companions: 'I was left alone and saw this great vision.' John the Baptist was in the desert, St Paul spent three years in Arabia, and the Lord Himself is no sooner dedicated to His great reforming work than He is summoned into the wilderness.

¶ Central Africa was to Stewart what Arabia was to Paul—a retreat in which he examined his own heart, revised his life, developed the self-reliance which is based upon the reliance of faith, and sought complete consecration to Christ and His service. In these great solitudes he had his musing times and sessions of sweet thought, and heard the voice of God more distinctly than elsewhere. 'His faith in God, always strong,' Dr Wallace writes, 'though not effusive, was strengthened by his experiences of the solitary life in the heart of Africa, entirely cut off from Christian fellowship. In a letter written to me, when his only companion was a native boy, he said that he had never felt so near heaven, and added that now to him, "God, holiness, and heaven are the only things worth living for."'[1]

God must get our ear before He can teach His lesson. He wants to teach us, but the voices of the world are ringing in our ears and He cannot secure our attention. In the full tide of social life, how often His words make no impression upon us. They do not come home to the heart. So God must detach us before He can teach us; He must cut off some of the objects that engross our thoughts; He must remove that which chokes the avenues of our soul that thus He may get our ear and teach His lesson. And so this friendship is sundered, and that earthly attachment is broken, and life, which used to be so full of social joy, is attenuated and narrowed down to loneliness. But one thing certain is this, that God has some special message for us, and He can only give it us alone.

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[1] J. Wells, *The Life of James Stewart of Lovedale*, 93.

2. Is it not in loneliness that we find ourselves enabled *to lay firmer hold upon God?* Cherished plants are often plunged into the darkness to encourage their roots to strike. In the midst of friends our need of the One Friend is perhaps scarcely felt. Life seems rich enough and full enough without Him. It is when He cuts off the attachments that we cherish, and the sense of isolation strikes home with all its keenness, that we feel our need of God. Our roots strike in the darkness. Our faith grasps Him with new tenacity. Our trust flings its tendrils around Him. Just as the photographer must take his picture into the dark room in order to develop it, so God deals with His children. They must be alone with God in the dark, in order that they may respond to His efforts to develop their characters. In God's dark room the heart is searched, and faith is intensified, and love is deepened, and the soul begins to exhibit new beauties that could never be developed in the light. 'Darkness shows us worlds of light we never saw by day.'

¶ Many are the testimonies to the transformations of earth's dark places. It was from the depths of reality that Ann Brontë sang:

Spirit of Faith! be thou my guide!
O clasp my hand in thine!
And never let me quit thy side:—
Thy comforts are divine.

Pride scorns thee for thy lowly mien:
But who like thee can rise
Above this toilsome, sordid scene,
Beyond the holy skies?

Through pain and death I can rejoice,
If but thy strength be mine;
Earth hath no music like thy voice,
Life owns no joy like thine.

Spirit of Faith! I'll go with thee;
Thou, if I hold thee fast,
Wilt guide, defend, and strengthen me,
And bear me home at last.

3. How often is solitude the cradle of *great purposes.* It is in the wilderness that men grow to the tallest stature and develop the most splendid heroism. Crowd life is dissipated and its energies are scattered far and wide. We give ourselves no time to think, to reflect. We occupy ourselves with unconsidered trifles, and think we are living just because we are occupied. But life is a sublimer thing than this. Life is existence with a purpose, with a goal. And often it needs the discipline of loneliness in order to get a clear view of what that purpose is.

The wilderness with God is the place for quiet thought and introspection. Michelangelo is said to have refused to see any one when he was meditating some great work of art. 'Art,' he said, 'is jealous. It requires the whole and entire man.' He would shut himself up in solitude, and in that solitude his most sublime conceptions were born.

If chosen souls could never be alone
In deep mid-silence, open-doored to God,
No greatness ever had been dreamed or done.

How wonderful is Christ in times of loneliness. It is then we know His sympathy. Our sufferings bring Him near and reveal Him to our spirits in the beauty of His faithful friendship. He was alone that He might comfort the lonely—alone among His enemies—alone even among His friends. And deeper than any depths we can ever sound was the abyss of loneliness into which He sank upon the Cross, when even the consciousness of the Father's presence was denied Him. He has trodden our path. Our High Priest has been touched with the feeling of our infirmities. And we in our loneliness can take Him home to our hearts as the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

No human heart can enter
Each dim recess of mine,
And soothe, and hush, and calm it,
O, blessed Lord, like Thine.

The Valley of Trouble

Hos. ii. 15.—'I will give . . . the valley of Achor for a door of hope.'

The promise of the valley of Achor for a doorway of hope is a poet's figure and rich in suggestion. For the gorge calls up some of the gloomiest associations of Israel's life. It is the scene of the terrible happenings recorded in Joshua when Achan fell into transgression and involved his people in a succession of defeats. For generations devout Israelites could recall it only as a doomed place over which rested the cloud of God's wrath. It was the valley of troubling. And yet, so full is the faith of the prophet in God, and in the gospel He has given him, that he tells his fellow-countrymen that at the very worst spot in the wilderness of their experience there is a door of hope. The valley that meant doom shall bring them deliverance. Men shall pass through it on their pilgrimage and emerge from it with surer step and a braver heart. The principle which lies enshrined in this great promise is abundantly clear. All trouble carries its hidden blessing.

History and life are really one long comment, one constant illustration of the truth that troublous things and contrary events do not break, but rather make, men. In truth the education of our race has been largely by that way. Such advance as men have made in outward things, in life's enrichment and security, has been thus. Men were faced by difficulties, by perils, by stern needs, by sore stress. And, for their overcoming, these things called forth skill and ingenuity, resources of thought and of contrivance. A measure of difficulty seems to be necessary to develop manhood. It is not in those climates where things grow without human labour that humanity grows to its best. Where the earth is so generous that men can be idle character suffers.

¶ The late Lord Rosebery, speaking at a St Andrew's dinner, attributed some of the success of Scotsmen to the barrenness of the Scottish soil. He quoted an eighteenth-century writer who described the face of Scotland as one that yielded nothing to sloth and denied nothing to the hand of industry. There, thought Lord Rosebery, was one secret of their success. The soil challenged them, they accepted the challenge, and developed character in doing so.

And also in the inner life of man it is thus advance was made. Pain and danger, suffering and calamity—these things besetting men, and, in their besetting, men learning new qualities of spirit, courage and endurance, understanding and sympathy, the high skill of healing and helpfulness. 'The Valley of Trouble for a Door of Hope'; in the long way of man's life upon the earth that has been in large part the secret of his progress and achieving.

This truth especially claims our thought as it finds place in our individual lives. For with us all there are certain valleys of trouble into which we come; valleys which God in His grace would give at last to be a doorway into hope.

1. *The Valley of Adversity.*—Adversity in one or other of its many forms—all of us enter this valley some time. At first it depresses the heart and seems to make an end of joy, but it is certain that it often leads to new enrichment, to new resources of strength. For many people the strain of life never seems to relax for a moment. Poverty dogs their steps. Others may have anxieties, but theirs is the care that never lightens day or night; for it concerns the bare necessities of life. Perpetual poverty, with never a day in which one can be easy or disengaged in mind—this is an intolerable burden which no Christian land should permit for any of its subjects. And, of course, no spiritual blessing that may be hidden in the bitter lot of the poor can ever excuse a moment's needless delay in the urgent task of raising the level of life. But it is beyond a doubt that the poor have often gloriously triumphed over circumstance. Bitter, also, is the fate of those who have been accustomed to comfort and a competence, and then are stripped in a day of all their possessions. How easy to become proudly resentful, and harshly impatient even of the sympathy of friends! Yet we have seen such disasters throw men and women back on the treasures of love and home, on possessions that can be neither bought nor sold, possessions that no fraud of man, no trick of fate, can ever invade. The loss of ease seemed but to give them heart for a braver struggle, and a spirit that turned with a simple trust to the God of life. So it is with sickness and ill-health, which come as an annoying interference with many plans. But to many in ill-health the soul returns

asking its great questions and resuming its long-interrupted task of building a house not made with hands.

¶ Lovers of Stevenson will always treasure his record of the brilliant, foolish, broken life which to some seemed the 'tale of a great failure, but which to those who remained true to him was the tale of a great success. Most men, finding themselves the authors of their own disgrace, rail the louder against God and destiny. Most men when they repent oblige their friends to share the bitterness of their repentance. But he had held an inquest and passed sentence, *mene, mene,* and condemned himself to smiling silence. Thus was our old comrade careless in the days of his strength; but on the coming of adversity, and when that strength was gone which had betrayed him (for our strength is weakness), he began to blossom and bring forth.'

2. *The Valley of Guilt.*—It is true that we have lost in measure our conscience for sin. Guilt does not trouble and alarm us as it did our fathers. But perhaps we have as deep a sense as they had of the total burden of existence, and we cannot well escape the conviction that sin is the bitterest part of that burden. Somewhere in our years we are moved to consider ourselves, to recall our way and reflect upon our deeds; and then, as we face what we have been and what we are, we enter on this valley. Transgressions of the past, wrongs which we have wrought, thoughts of the might-have-been, understanding of the poor uses to which we have put life's opportunity; these things fall on mind and heart sharp and harsh. When we see how great has been our squandering of the priceless gift of life, when we know ourselves as we have made ourselves, when the wrongs which we have done come back, no longer things which promise pleasure, but cold, accusing forms of shame and judgment; life has no darker time than that, and none more hopeless. There are many, it has been said, who offer us a golden to-morrow, but it is only Christ who enables us to retrieve our yesterday. And in this valley of guilt God meets us in Christ, and speaks to us of forgiveness, of a fresh beginning, of a new life which may redeem the old.

3. *The Valley of Sorrow.*—Life is a long series of separations, separations from things cherished and beloved. Childhood, boyhood, youth, manhood—steadily is our hold on each relaxed, and they pass from us one by one. And in the progress of the years so many other things do go: dreams and ambitions, tasks and opportunities, passions and powers. And from our side, too, there fall out comrades and loved ones, and voices are hushed, and the way grows lonely. But the valley of sorrow is not far from the Kingdom of God. It is true that often we do not know how priceless was the gift of our loved ones till we have lost them. But even if the ache remains, love itself becomes more wonderful, and the God who gave it and who guards it grows upon our view and trust. Sorrow strains its eyes to follow the track of those that leave us, and in the looking catches some far-off radiance. More than any other experience of life, sorrow compels us to link the seen and the unseen, and to find our security in a living God, who is God not of the dead but of the living. So do men make a triumphant capture of the future and of the life everlasting. The valley of sorrow since Christ's passing has been transformed into a place of vision and hope.

I walked a mile with Pleasure;
  She chattered all the way,
But left me none the wiser
  For all she had to say.

I walked a mile with Sorrow,
  And ne'er a word said she,
But, oh, the things I learned from her,
  When Sorrow walked with me![1]

A Call and a Warning

Hos. vi. 1-4.—'Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord. . . . O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.'

What stands out as essential in repentance is a man's turning from his sin to God. Two forces account for this turning—a sense of sin and an apprehension of God's mercy. And both have their place; only they are not of equal weight. Since in men the force which draws is stronger than that which drives, the first necessity is a vision of what God is like. Hosea is abundantly conscious of the guilt of men, but he is still more conscious of God's mercy. In the previous verse he has darkly hinted at the possibility of God's leaving the Hebrews to themselves; but when he makes one effort more to get at their hearts, it is not by way of storm and scolding, but by a fresh exhibition of the inimitable grace of God. You cannot have seen my God as I see Him, for no one could resist the appeal of that amazing beauty. And thus, as it were, he takes the people by the hand and says, 'Let us go together, you and me, to seek Him'; and by way of persuasion, he tells of what God is like. For he believed, as Paul did, that it is 'the *goodness* of the Lord which leads to repentance.' Let us consider what he says in commendation of his God and ours.

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[1] R. B. Hamilton.

1. *God's Nearness.*—He speaks of Him as near: 'After two days will he revive us, on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.' No slow approaches are needed, no gradual processes extending over years, for renewal is possible at once. To a mass of men God is little else than a name, a formless rumour of power and fear, but such men do not know the help of His presence. A woman whose boy has died will often grow impatient when good people talk to her of God, for all her boy's ways rise up in her memory, and all he has been to her. Nothing could be more definite; and over against this absolute distinctness of remembrance are a few vague words about God's goodness—a great blank, a face with no features, a formless immensity, without helping power of any kind. That is what also makes repentance difficult. Men are held by such very substantial restraints. What they are is due not to the free choice of to-day, but to the growth of habit extending over years. Education and friendships and the standards and opinions of their set have made their mark upon them; and though at times they would like to make some clear amendment, they are always hampered by their past. When a preacher calls them to attempt a new beginning, their better sense admits that he is right; but as they leave the Church this solid fact of habit reasserts itself, and in face of it they scarcely even try. If on their side they knew of a power as actual and as close as the power against them, they might take courage; but because they know of none they are beaten before ever they begin the fight.

2. *God's Graciousness.*—But further, in commendation of his God, the prophet declares that He is gracious. He multiplies pleasant words, attributing to God such gifts as, if we heartily believed in them, would leave us little room for mourning. There are sore hearts everywhere and men whose life is running low, and to these he makes the declaration about God that He will heal, that He will bind up, that men shall *live*—live and not merely exist—in His sight. The Greek version of the Old Testament adds a delightful phrase, which is a little gospel in itself. 'Let us follow on to know the Lord, and we *shall find Him as a dawn prepared.*' Our day is nearly done, men say, and we now are bound to travel on in deepening gloom to darkness and eclipse and defeat. It is not so, says Hosea; I will tell you of One who can give you the dew of the morning again, and an outlook over the radiant possibilities of a whole new day. God's power is infinite, says the prophet, but it works always through His kindness; it is a power of healing.

Words are often nothing more than words; but the message here is interpreted by the prophet's act and attitude; for he himself is without fear in God's high presence, and taking his people with him, as it were, he associates his confidence with their obscure distrust of God. Since they cannot see, it is the duty of any one with eyes to deliver them from distrust by his boldness, and from fear by his rejoicing. That is where all good men, in their measure, have served the world. They are like the vowels in the alphabet of society, helping into utterance much that else would remain unspoken. There are vague gropings after goodness in men whose standard of life is low: there are shamefaced ideals, and shy instincts which might speak out if someone else spoke first. And when a good man comes, not pretending to superiority but living as a man with men, his courage makes many brave, his trust in God awakens hope in others. 'Come,' says this great heart in an act of loving association with the moral bankruptcy about him—'Come, let us return to the Lord.' And some began to pray, who could never by themselves have prayed; they felt that in God there must be a very wealth of grace when they looked upon the contentment of this sorely-tried man. There was a light in his face which, according to their calculations, ought not to have been there, and it seemed to come to him from knowing that God who to them was only a rumour. So interest stirred; and if they did not wish for God Himself, they wished for the healing effects of His presence, as these appeared in the face of this His servant. 'God took me,' says one, 'from a horrible pit and from the miry clay, he set my feet on a rock, and established my goings (starting me out on life again), he put a new song in my mouth of praise to our God.' And then he adds, 'Many shall see it and shall fear, and shall trust in the Lord,' for faith is quickened by contact with the believing. That is a description of the way in which Jesus Himself helped men and helps them still. 'It is through him,' says Peter, 'that we are believers in God.'

¶ The Rev. F. Holmes, minister of the church in which Dr Peake was a member, gives this striking testimony to the influence of the great scholar. 'Dr Peake's personal faith always impressed us with its simplicity and its strength. In spite of all the changing forms of religious thought, about which he knew so much, he ever kept fresh and fertile and fruitful his confidence in God and in the gospel of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. We sometimes wondered how he managed to do this until we came to know that he had a holy of holies within, and that he was one of those who always keep their altar fires burning. It is no wonder then that at times the expression of his faith had the touch of radiance, nor that, to borrow the quaint but sufficient term of George MacDonald, he was a "faith-begetter." Many have lit their lamps at his altar flame.'

3. *God's Endlessness.*—The prophet bears witness also to the endlessness of God. In his call to 'know, to follow on to know the Lord,' he hints that there is more to learn of God than the wisest has yet declared, that there are heights beyond our highest. Some people hold back from faith because of the way in which it was first presented to them; to this day they stumble over points of doctrine on which their early teachers laid exclusive stress, and thus they are kept from knowledge of their own. But in God there is room for many opinions. Saint, prophet, evangelist in turn proclaimed what they had discovered of Him, until it might have seemed that nothing more was left to know or to declare. But always others came, like voyagers standing at some different bay in a continent only half explored, and their report is of new territories through which they passed.

¶ 'The East,' Lord Curzon has said, 'is a university, in which the scholar never takes his degree. It is a temple, in which the suppliant adores, but never catches sight of the object of his devotion. It is a journey, the goal of which is never attained. There we are always learners, always worshippers, always pilgrims.'

Thus the prophet spoke, calling his fellows back to a God so wonderful; but then, with sudden passion, he adds a warning. He saw how easily his message might be abused by men who, for a moment, would catch at it, and then let it go. When they are in trouble many are glad to hear of mercy, but they wish nothing else than mercy. An old Scottish preacher says bluntly: 'Esau grat his fill, but he never grat himself into repentance.' People are ready to leap at what penitence secures, but penitence itself, the deep and resolute turning to God, may lie outside their calculation. Nothing is more baffling than such a temper; and Hosea represents the great God Himself as at His wits' end with men who have desires, and confessions, and even tears, but in whom nothing is deep or enduring. 'O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? For thy goodness is like the morning mist, which goes soon away.'

'The great want of modern piety,' says Faber, 'is a deep, vigorous, inward repentance. Life goes too fast for that. Rapid livers and rapid thinkers make rapid worshippers; and rapid worshippers are rapid penitents, and the spirit of inward repentance fares ill with all this. Deep work is too slow for our modern pace.' The contrast is scarcely just as between ancient and modern, for the trouble is of all ages alike. The woman through whose disloyalty the prophet had to learn his lesson was glad to see her husband —good, easy creature—come after her; but she had no conception of what his forgiveness of her cost him, or what it aimed at. He had enthroned her once in his heart as queen, and it was agony to think of her as disgraced and fallen. To see her merely clean and decent was far too little, for love is relentless in its demands; but for that she cared nothing, and our superficial penitence fails at the same point.

'We thus judge,' says Paul, 'that if one died for all then all died, and that he died for all that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but to him who died for them and rose again.' It is thus that repentance must be deepened by consideration not of what we desire—kindness, healing, friendship—but of what He desires. 'He gave himself for us,' says Paul again, 'that he might purify us unto himself as a people for his own possession, zealous for good works.' That is the Lord to whom we must return, and with whom our life is safe.

Increasing Knowledge

Hos. vi. 3.—'Let us follow on to know the Lord' (R.V.).

THE whole story of our life's discipleship is just this following on to know the Lord. Where there is sincerity in religion there must be this persistent effort after fuller knowledge. But if it is to be a satisfying knowledge we must desire it greatly, and the depth of the knowledge gained will be according to the intensity of our desire. There are those who say, 'I would like to know if we have any proof that God exists, and then I will make up my mind what I will do about it.' We cannot do that. We cannot know much of God if we are content to remain far from Him either in our immediate consciousness or in our moral life. Personal knowledge depends upon contact and friendship. We cannot know a person well if we never meet him; we cannot know other people well unless we are willing to be their friend. So it is with God. 'I have not called you servants,' said Jesus to the disciples, 'but friends.'

What we need is to get nearer to that same Lord, and seek to reproduce Him in life and conduct. Let us not be content with what is considered the usual respectable Christian life—let us follow on to know the Lord.

1. For example, let us make Jesus' view of life our own. No one can really bring himself up against Jesus without feeling self-condemned. We are able to live as we do simply because we do not bring ourselves into the light of Christ's countenance. We measure ourselves by our fellows and are content. But Jesus came into the world to preach and teach a 'Way of Life.' He not only preached and taught it. He was it. 'I am the Way.' The way of life which Jesus taught and illustrated was not simply a better way than the way of the world; it was a totally different way. It had different notions, different aims and a different goal. It is this primary but all-important fact that Christian people have not yet grasped. The Christian life is not merely a better life than that followed by the man of the world—it is a different one. Christian people recognize that superior obligations rest upon them—obligations to refrain from certain forms of wrongdoing, obligations to practise something extra in the way of beneficence, and as a rule they discharge these superior obligations. And yet the basal principles of life, the main motives of life, remain the same, very much as in the case of the non-Christian. But Jesus' way of life is not an improvement on the worldly life; it is something totally different from it. The fact is, we call Christ Master, but we really have not adopted His way, because His way is different from the way that ordinary men travel. Take His teaching about rights and duties. He came into the world where a certain self-assertiveness was an element in its conception of the ideal man. The great man was the man who maintained his rights and insisted on his place. It may be that no one writing to-day would include self-assertiveness, insistence upon rights, as an essential element in human greatness. But, as a matter of practice, men do insist upon their rights. They talk far more about their rights than they do about their duties. And the world is where it is to-day because of that false emphasis.

Now Jesus' conception of a right was of something that its possessor was justified in giving away. Duties were at all costs to be loyally done, but rights were things a man was free to surrender. Jesus did surrender them. If He had insisted upon His rights there would have been no Bethlehem, there would have been no Calvary, there would have been no Atonement, there would have been no forgiveness of sin. 'Being in the form of God,' says St Paul in a mighty and moving passage, 'he counted not his equality with God a thing to be grasped at and clung to, but emptied himself, and being found in fashion as a man he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross.' What a surrender of rights is here! Duty, the will of His Father, was everything with Jesus—His rights He freely gave away. And what was the way for Him is the way also for His followers. But have we walked it? As a matter of fact, have we not placed all the emphasis upon rights—rights of men, rights of women, rights of nations, rights of capital, rights of labour? And is not all the havoc and shame of the world due to our insistence on them? For when a man insists upon his rights, what is he doing but setting self at the very centre of things? And Christ put at the centre not self but the will of God: not self but service and sacrifice. Now what the world wants and waits to see is Christian people accepting Jesus' way, letting Him really be Master, interpreting life in terms not of rights but of duties, not of self but of sacrifice.

¶ Bishop Westcott has said: 'Men cannot, even with a show of reason, press their "rights" to the uttermost. They ask for forgiveness as they have forgiven—forgiven, that is, real wrongs—forgone just claims. We have indeed "no rights but duties"; and these can never be discharged in full. In strictness of account we must remain debtors to the end; and through the obligations of our Faith we are debtors to all who need us.[1]

And as we want to acknowledge His mastery in the individual life, so do we want to acknowledge His mastery in our civic and national life. There is no solution for our problems but a shift of emphasis from rights to duties, an interpretation of life not in terms of self but in terms of sacrifice. Nothing else but this will settle our industrial strife at home. Nothing else but this will really give us peace on earth. Every war has arisen from an insistence upon natural rights. Only the practice of Christ's way in our international relations will make war impossible. We must have a larger conception of the mission of Christ. He came not simply to save individual souls. He came also to establish a kingdom. But a great many Christian people have overlooked or neglected the social aspect of Christ's mission. They have ignored the Kingdom of God. They have not thought of Him as Lord and Lawgiver for all social and business and civic life. We have unduly narrowed and limited and contracted notions of Jesus. We must get bigger ideas of Him.

¶ John Bright, unveiling the statue to Cobden in the Bradford Exchange, said, 'We tried to put Holy Writ into an act of Parliament.' We want the mind of Christ put into commerce, laws, pleasures, and the whole of human life.[1]

2. Then we need a larger conception of the power of Jesus, such a conception of His power as shall restore to us the limitless and triumphant faith of the early days. As a well-known American theologian points out, the one great outstanding word of the New Testament is power—not love or peace or hope, but power. It is the characteristic New Testament word. That is what characterized Jesus Himself, power, *dynamis*, which is our word 'dynamite.' It characterized His speech. He spoke as one having authority. It characterized His actions. The power of the Lord was present with Him for to heal. And the same power characterized the speech and work of the Apostles. With great power gave the Apostles witness. They preached Christ and He proved Himself to be spiritual dynamite, breaking up evil hearts, blowing up ancient prejudices, smashing down evil customs and tyrannies. Dynamite! In Jesus, these first disciples felt they had limitless power—the power of God that was equal to the task of saving any one and everyone. So with a magnificent confidence they went everywhere preaching the Word and turned the world upside down.

We want their faith in Christ as power. We need an altogether bigger conception of our Lord. We want to see Him freed from all limitations and restrictions set upon His power. Why is it that in these days we get so dispirited and depressed? The early Christians were not depressed, they were a jubilant and triumphant set of men. They were thus jubilant because they knew Jesus as the Power of God. But we have Jesus still, and why should we not be jubilant too? Can it be because the critical and half-sceptical writing of the past half-century has had its effect upon us, and unconsciously almost we have whittled down our conceptions of Jesus until we preach Him to-day as the best and wisest of teachers, but not as the mighty power of God? And preaching will never be mighty to the pulling down of strongholds until, with unfaltering confidence and courage, we preach Jesus, preach Him as equal to every emergency, sufficient for every need, able to break every chain. And perhaps to that end it is a large experience of the power of Jesus in our own lives. Suppose we let the power resident in Jesus flow into our lives, to break in on our bondage to old habits, to give us the victory over besetting sins, to rescue us from easy compromises, to make us equal to high enterprise and endeavour—then we shall preach Him as Power. For there are resources in Jesus on which we have never drawn. He is God's dynamite. There is no limit to His power. Let us experiment with this mighty Jesus. Let us know, let us follow on to know the Lord.

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[1] *Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott*, ii. 135.

[1] H. S. Coffin.

¶ There is a bonnie story, I suppose a legend, that when in the first days of the struggle the British troops were landing in France and swinging through the streets cheering and shouting 'Hip, hurrah!', the children, to whose ears tales of disaster and retreat were blowing from the Front, bravely translated the coming of their allies and their alien shout into a very comfortable promise, '*Il pourra*! he is able! he will manage! he will pull it off!' they cried about the streets, and laughed at fear. That is the very spirit of the Testament. 'He is able,' they keep saying happily, is surely able to meet every call upon us, and went on to meet them unafraid.[1]

3. We also need bigger and more exalted views of Christ's person. In the long run the kind of faith we have in His power will depend on the view we take of His person. What we have been suffering from in these later years is inadequate views of the person of Christ. The humanitarian view of Jesus leaves us without a mighty emancipating gospel, a Jesus stripped of all His supernatural qualities and reduced to the limits of a prophet—the charming peasant-prophet of Renan's dream, for example—provides us with no redeeming gospel for a sinning world. A Church with just a beautiful pathetic human Jesus to preach is bound to be a helpless and ineffective Church. We do not minimize the importance of the historic earthly life of Jesus. Our gospel springs out of the facts of His birth, His death, His glorious resurrection.

We may learn something from the way in which the experience of the early disciples was enlarged as we ponder the closing sentences of the Gospels, and read the messages of the Epistles, and see how men grew into the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a controversy which reappears in every age and ranges around the question, 'Jesus or Christ?' The scholar comes with his painstaking learning, his confident historical criticism, and his daring generalizations, and we are told that the Christ of the Epistles, and especially of the Epistles of Paul, is not the Jesus of the Gospels. We are bidden to go back to the honest prose of the story of Capernaum and the tender romance of the idylls of Bethany, to find the real Jesus, wise, gentle, meek, and tender, but only with a human wisdom and a mortal tenderness. One answer to the critic is this, that there *is* a distinct difference between the Jesus of the Gospels and the Christ of the Epistles. It is a difference of which both Gospels and Epistles are fully aware. It is the difference between the knowledge of one who is known no longer after the flesh. It is explained by this clear and momentous truth that the disciples have followed on to know the Lord. They could never forget Jesus of Nazareth, their Friend and their Master—their memories were too deeply dyed with the imperishable story of His life. But they rose to a new plane of knowledge after their Lord's resurrection. The glory of the risen Lord and the certainty of His presence paled the words and deeds of Galilee and Samaria. 'I count all things but loss,' says St Paul, 'that I may know him and the power of his resurrection.' Then after the Ascension they came to see surely that Christ is Lord of all. And still they followed on to a knowledge—no longer after the flesh but after the spirit. Christ was formed within them, pulsing with their wills and becoming the energy of their lives. That is how the Apostles knew Him—not simply as the human Jesus but as the mighty Lord.

And the facts constrain us to a like faith still. What we need is a recovery of faith in this great and exalted and Divine Christ. A recovery of faith in the glorified Christ, the Divine Christ of apostolic belief, the indwelling Christ, will give us back the apostolic confidence and power. 'This is the victory that overcometh the world,' says St John, 'even our faith.' And then he adds this significant sentence, 'And who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?'

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[1] A. J. Gossip, *The Galilean Accent*, 217.

Transient Goodness

Hos. vi. 4.—'O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.'

Most of the prophets seem concerned only with the evils they see; and sometimes their message strikes us as harsh and hopeless. But Hosea is distinguished from the rest of the goodly fellowship of the prophets by his tenderer nature and his more human sympathies; and this has given him a profounder insight into the real condition of human nature. He sees the good there is in it; the weakness is in its admixture with evil, and especially in the uncertainty and evanescence of the good, which is as fickle and misleading as the morning weather. It is so easily stirred by generous emotions and attracted by high ideals; the difficulty is to secure their effectiveness and permanence. Man has good inclinations and tendencies within him that might make for righteousness, but they are so soon exhausted. He seems able to live only by some intermittent principle, and most often achieves nothing better than a continual rise and fall in his ethical life.

We see the ideal, are visited by high and holy thought and feeling, are ashamed of our inferiority, vividly see what we ought to be, receive a sudden influx of power, and resolve to lead a worthier life. Most men know these special times of illumination and conviction, brought about, it may be, in various ways—by calamities and sorrows, by special mercies and blessings, by the message of the pulpit, and often simply by the direct action of the Spirit upon the conscience and heart. Yet all these exercises of mind, these stirrings of the heart, these good resolutions prove vain. Nothing permanent comes of it. Thus multitudes are inconstant, fitful, wavering. Their goodness never lasts: ever beginning anew, then relapsing; ever making a show, good feelings, aspirations, resolves, and yet there is no abiding result.

¶ Richard Steele, the essayist, wrote one morning to his wife after a racketing night, 'Dear Prue, sober or not I am ever yours, R. S.' and there is no doubt that, for the moment, he meant what he said. But the fact was that, sober or not, he was not ever hers. He might return to her, but it required no very commanding interest to catch his mind away elsewhere, whilst poor Prue had to wait suspicious and indignant at home. A great deal of religion is of this quality, fugitive and volatile: 'O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?' cried God, 'for thy goodness is like the morning mist which quickly disappears'; and we cannot wonder that it should remain without effect.[1]

1. Religion is not a thing of mere moods and frames of mind. It is not a mere emotion, but the power and principle of a new life. This does not mean that religious life, like other life, has no ups and downs, no inevitable vicissitudes. It has its times of clear vision and realization of the love of God; its times of lively conviction or of tranquil confidence, of touching emotion and of settled peace. But it has also its fears and troubles, its dulness and depression. To-day the Psalmist exults in God as his chiefest joy; to-morrow he remembers God, and is troubled. At one time he is sure that the Lord's mercy endureth for ever; at another he cries out, 'Is thy mercy clean gone?' Thus variable is the inner life even of the most spiritual of men. Yet such a life may not be at all like the morning cloud or the early dew; but on the contrary, with all its variations, its path may be as the path of light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

¶ John Bunyan admits: 'Though God has visited my soul with never so blessed a discovery of Himself, yet afterwards I have been in my spirit so filled with darkness, that I could not so much as once conceive what that God and that comfort was with which I had been refreshed.'

What the prophet complains of is that the people were satisfied with penitent feelings which led to no practical results. They were satisfied with the temporary stirring up of a little emotion, without any strenuous effort to turn it to practical account. And the evil of indulging in this kind of mere emotional goodness is that every time it is repeated it blunts our moral sensibilities, and enfeebles our moral power, and produces at last, if we persist in it, a deep-seated unbelief in all spiritual things. That result is vividly set before us in the parable of the man from whom the evil spirits went forth for a season. He had left his old house empty, unoccupied, untenanted, with no busy work going on in it, and therefore it was easy to return and take possession again. And it is certain that, in such a case, the old evil power will return with fresh force, and it will be harder than ever to shake off its hold. Not only so, but every time that besetting sins prevail against us, our faith in God and in all spiritual things grows weaker and weaker, until we run the risk of losing all belief in a better life. A man who has thus quenched the Spirit comes at last to lose all faith. He says, 'Oh, I have felt all that before, and there is nothing in it; it never comes to any result.' And that is the most deadly of all unbeliefs. The scepticism of the intellect questioning and cavilling about doctrine is comparatively a shallow thing. But that is a fatal unbelief which learns to distrust goodness and the Spirit that pleads for it, and feels no sting of conscience.

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[1] W. M. Macgregor.

Religion is neither a doctrine of truth nor an emotion of piety, but it is both of them working together to bring about a life of practical goodness. A mere intellectual religion of creed and dogma is a poor affair, but a mere emotional one of regrets and longings is not a whit better. The former may abide and work no change of character, the latter may pass like an effervescence, and leave our heart stale and dead, but neither will bring us a step nearer God. To think that all is well when our opinions are right, or that we need no more than to have our heart touched for a little with lively emotion—either of these is a kind of religion made easy. But what we need is, not religion made easy, but religion made earnest, to depart from evil and learn to do well.

2. In the New Testament our Lord teaches the obligation of permanence. 'Abide in me, and I in you.' Revelation puts no value on sudden exuberance of feeling, on surprised confession, on temporary panic or ecstasy. 'Persistence is the sign of reality.' Whatever does not persist may be fancy, sentiment, or imagination; but it is not the righteousness of God, nor does it avail in His sight. These brief seasons are all too short to bring to any kind of maturity the faint beginnings of higher qualities and graces.

¶ A distinguished traveller tells of a certain region of Asia where the night temperature is below the freezing-point all the year round, with the exception of a couple of weeks in the middle of summer. What may be expected here when for a few days the glass gets above freezing? What flowers will bloom? What kind of harvest will be reaped? There can be nothing but pathetic, abortive beginnings, dubious signs of life falling back into death and darkness.

We know the dangers only too well from our own fluctuating feelings. We have had our high moments, when we saw the light, discerned the truth and vowed eternal fidelity. But those moments are often superseded by a reaction, and remain, not as permanent impulses, but only as memories. We had a great emotion in which it was possible to vow almost everything; but we may have lived to drift back again to an undirected and undedicated life, determined by outward events, swayed by the opinions of others, coerced by the constant compromises of life. Or we may still cling to the vision as something we mean to obey some day when circumstances are more propitious, when we can work ourselves up to take the final step; but if so we must be getting rather alarmed at the poor prospect of realization. What disconcerts us is that we do not keep our resolutions. We do have sudden awakenings. We discover that we are losing ground, that some bad habit is gaining upon us, and we determine to change it. It may be a quite small thing: procrastination of decisions or conflicts until things are decided for us; battles which are never lost only because they are never fought; a growing irritability which makes it difficult for people to live or work with us; slothfulness which is gradually destroying our efficiency; a constant speaking about ourselves which is making us a bore to every one. Or it may be something much more serious—some horrid habit or disgusting vice which we resolve with sincere intention for the moment to give up. But we discover that to will is easy, to carry out is astonishingly difficult. What we lack is sustained vitality. If we could only feel the breezes of the Spirit carrying our barque to the desired haven!

3. How may we convert these movements of the soul into abiding goodness? Many fail because they do not take measures to perpetuate

the higher life that these precious visitations of grace initiate. A French writer observes, 'Poetry is not a permanent state of the soul'; and it is certain that no high, intense mood may long abide. The artist does not continue in an inspired condition, but he understands how to take advantage of it, and by care and diligence to perpetuate whatever he has gained. The astrononomer finds only a few days in a year when the vision of the heavens is perfect, but he acts so promptly and practically in these privileged hours that they enrich the rest of his lifetime. The great thing is to take care that the times of our spiritual visitation do not exhaust themselves but that they are seized, economized, and perpetuated. We must follow on to know the Lord. By wise and practical effort we must fix the gracious inspiration.

¶ When Daguerre was working at his sun-pictures, his great difficulty was to fix them. The sun came and imprinted the image, but when the tablet was drawn from the camera, the image had vanished. But by and by he discovered a chemical solution which detained and arrested the image, and turned the evanescent into the durable.

And as we do not, and were not intended to, live this life alone, we must have our faith sharpened and our emulation stimulated by others who have the same aim and are travelling to the same goal. We must cultivate the communion of saints, and that means more than having our name registered as a member of a church. And above all, there must be that spirit of prayer which keeps us in continual contact with our Lord. So shall we be His disciples and glorify the Father by bearing much fruit.

A False Standard

Hos. vi. 7.—'But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me.'

In the Old Testament the idea of covenant colours the whole history. Pious Jews, looking back, interpreted the past of their race by this great thought. They were the children of the promise and the promise was the gracious relationship into which God entered with the people of Israel. From Hosea's prophecies we can see that it did not mean any legal agreement, a formal bargain; and still less could it give ground for arrogance and presumption. To him it was a figure of speech by which he expressed his interpretation of the spiritual history of Israel, stating the terms of love in which God stood towards them, and on the other side the moral obligations that lay upon them in view of that gracious attitude. Israel's privilege meant Israel's duty. The covenant was broken when they ceased to do justly and love mercy and walk humbly with God. They put themselves out of that sweet relationship, wilfully robbed themselves of the promise, when they did not perform their part of the loving contract. They took the rank and place of other men. 'They like men transgressed the covenant.'

Thus these words are more than an assertion of universal human fallibility, more than saying that it is human to err, like men to transgress. It is the assertion of a higher standard for Israel. Israel had special privileges, peculiar opportunities, and was charged with a mission. To fail, to be after all only like other men, was to come under heavier condemnation. It is no excuse to them that they are just like others. If they are not better than others, they are worse; for they have sinned against clearer light, and sinned against special love. Their degradation is deeper far than even that of the heathen. To ordinary sin they have added the sin of apostasy. It is treachery against the gracious God, an insult thrown in the very face of Love. 'Like men they have transgressed the covenant: they have dealt treacherously against me.'

1. The principle of this greater condemnation is a common one, and works out in every relationship of life. Every step of progress sets a new standard; and men are judged not by what they have passed on the way, but by what they have attained. The Christian conscience of our time and country is our standard, not the pagan conscience of a past time or of a heathen land. Every advance is a fresh obligation. New light is new responsibility. Israel cannot be as the heathen, cannot be like other men, without greater sin than even theirs; for Israel has had clearer knowledge and higher privilege. The law is invariable and reasonable. 'To him that hath is given.' To him that finishes a task is set a new burden. The more you do, the more you get to do. It is the reward of efficiency.

In business the capable man is not laid on the shelf as a reward for his capacity. He is promoted, advanced to harder and more responsible positions. It is the practice of life; and we recognize the principle in every sphere.

There is, however, a constant tendency to level down the standard, and to be content with just what is expected by the mass. It was against this tendency that the prophets ever had to strive. Israel was always tempted to give up being a peculiar people in this sense of having special moral responsibility. The higher religion with its sterner, simpler rites, with its great moral claims on life, was continually menaced by the surrounding idolatries with their appeal to sense, and their laxer standard. There was also a heathen party in Israel, even in her most faithful days, a party ever ready to take advantage of any weakening of the religious conscience and ever making a strong appeal to the lower instincts of the nation. Why should they alone attempt the impossible? Why should they be bound to a covenant so severe? Why not be like the men of the place, like the men around them, who get on very well and have a happier time where less is expected of them? The strongest count in Hosea's indictment against them, that 'they like men transgressed the covenant,' was also the strongest temptation.

It is the common temptation still to accommodate oneself to environment. We excuse ourselves that we are just like men when we transgress the covenant, the covenant which our own hearts acknowledge. We know from sad experience how easy it is to slip down to lower levels and content ourselves with the attainments and the conduct expected by society. And we do not need to look far for encouragement. The men who will sneer at you for being a 'saint' will admire you for being what they call a man of the world. It needs a staunch heart and a consecrated will to resist the worldly influences to be as the men of the place.

¶ Count Zinzendorf, when sent to make the grand tour to finish his education, wrote before he set out, 'If the object of my being sent to France is to make me a man of the world, I declare that this is money thrown away; for God will in His goodness preserve in me the desire to live only for Jesus Christ.' His friends did not want him to be unlike men, in the absorbing passion for Christ he had even as a boy, which afterwards produced the great missionary zeal of the Moravian Church. They would rather he had gone to Paris, and done as others did, and come back to be like his set, as we say.

To accommodate oneself to environment in thought and conduct, to adopt the common tone, only careful to avoid singularity, means in practice the choice of the lower part. Evil is none the less evil, though we follow a multitude to do it. The covenant is transgressed, and the penalty of transgression is ours, though it be like men to transgress. There can be little moral backbone in a character without a certain independence, forming judgments and making decisions and regulating life according to conscience and not according to outside opinion.

¶ Ralph Erskine observes that that portion of the Pharisee's prayer wherein he thanked God that he was not like other men was not amiss for the substance of it, if it had not proceeded from a proud and vainglorious spirit. Every one should labour to be not like others. It was among the dying regrets of Dr Johnson: 'I have lived too much like other men.' [1]

2. In addition to this outside pressure of a low worldly standard, another subtle encouragement to reduce the level of conduct is due to a disillusionment which comes regarding others, sometimes in men we have admired and looked up to. We find out their limitations, and are often disappointed in them. We find they are like men, hampered by the same weakness, liable to the same temptations, overtaken by the same faults. We take a low estimate of human nature, and bring down our own standard of duty to suit it. Perhaps it is in some business point about which we once had searchings of heart, some doubtful practice which we now condone as merely the custom of the trade. Or it may be some social evil which we join in and call the ways of our set, the habits of our circle, and it would be puritanic of us to object. We are only doing what others do.

On such reasoning there could be no progress at all. This is true in every region of man's activity. On the same principle why should a man seek truth and pursue it earnestly? Why should he ever oppose the prejudices of the crowd in science or philosophy, in art or literature? Can he not content himself with the knowledge and attainments that are common, and be like men? So in the moral world we could argue a defence of anything by finding companions, sink we as low as we might. We have not come to our kingdom as men till we have got past the merely social conscience, the outside standard of others, and have within ourselves a measure of right and wrong, and are parties to a personal covenant in which we stand to God.

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[1] S. Law Wilson.

In practice it comes to be simply this as the practical rule of life, that we who have stood in the new covenant through Christ are called not to do and be like men, but to do and be like Jesus the Son of Man, who has given us an Example that we should follow in His steps. He henceforth represents man to us as well as God. Whatever dishonours Him dishonours our own soul. His very presence in our sinful world is an eternal protest against the low creed which would disinherit us from our Divine portion, which would link us to all beneath us and break the links with all above us. To see the beauty of His holiness; to see Him full of grace and truth, and behold the glory of the Son of Man, is to know once for all our true place in the universe of God, and to know that we are called to walk worthy of our great vocation.

¶ No other artist ever learned the secret of Titian's red. In any gallery it flames out from afar, with its splendour of richness calling aloud the painter's name. Hang any picture beside it, and though that other may be quite a sound and even striking piece of work, it will by that trying comparison be made to look dull and commonplace and dingy. Yet the New Testament insists on taking us to Calvary, insists on judging our life there, against that tremendous background, keeps looking from it to that, and if they do not match, then we have failed. We, too, must have Christ's mind; we, too, must use life in Christ's way; we, too, must catch Christ's very spirit and must reproduce it in the little nothings that make up our days.[1]

One-sided Development

Hos. vii. 8.—'Ephraim is a cake not turned.'

On the one side Ephraim worshipped Jehovah, and on the other mixed among the heathen and worshipped idols, and so he was like a cake not turned, baked on the one side and soft dough on the other. According to George Adam Smith, Ephraim's peril was the fascination of this intercourse with strangers. He shows that between Judea and Ephraim there is all the difference in the world. 'Ephraim,' he says, 'lies as open and fertile as her sister province is barren and aloof. She has many gates into the world and they open upon many markets.' And, with all the nations of the world surging through those gates, she forgot her Maker. 'Ephraim,' says the prophet, 'is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength.' Looking on the nation he loved, the prophet saw how richly endowed and how uniquely favoured it had been. It ought to have been the benefactor of all other peoples. But the leaders were throwing away the nation's opportunities, and Ephraim was being ruined and would be cast on the scrap-heap. 'Ephraim was an unturned scone.' It was a plain, blunt way of sending a warning home to the heart of every citizen.

The world is full of one-sided people; people who are only half-baked; who have their good points and their weak or bad points; who are well developed in some lines and deficient and deformed in others. It is hard to get all good points in one person; to find a symmetrically proportioned, fully developed man. Such a man would be unique in the world, and in fact only one such perfect Man ever lived. Yet this many-sided, all-around development should be our ideal and effort.

1. *In Education.*—One of the vital points in education is to keep the mind and body in balance and not let one outgrow the other. A strong body and a feeble mind, or a feeble body and a strong mind—either combination produces a one-sided man. In childhood the body is the main factor and should have plenty of food and air and exercise and play and sleep. There is danger of overdriving children in our schools. It is pitiful to see a child with the lines of thought and worry on its face. In former days little attention was paid to the

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[1] A. J. Gossip, *The Galilean Accent*, 222.

body, and pressure was put on the mind, but now athletics are prominent and the body is being developed and trained. We should not run to excess in this direction and put the body above the mind and make more of the animal than of the mental, but we should keep the two well balanced. Within the mind itself there is danger of one-sidedness. Intellect and affection should grow together. The man who is all intellect, who can think but not feel, is only a small fraction of a man. Still more fatal to full manhood is the process by which the intellect absorbs the power of faith and dries up the instincts of worship. Science is in danger of fixing its gaze so closely upon matter that it cannot see the Mind that is everywhere behind matter, and of thus missing the larger meaning of the world.

¶ Sir Isaac Newton was right when he said to Dr Halley, a man of science, but an unbeliever in God's Word, 'I am glad to hear you speak about astronomy or mathematics, for you have studied and you understand them; but you should not talk of Christianity, for you have not studied it.'

2. *The Material and the Spiritual Side of Life.*—There is a material side of life, rooted in the earth, which is of vast importance. Its concerns are the body with its appetites and senses, business, art and pleasure. It digs in the soil for bread and seeks to turn everything into wealth. It has a thirst for money. On this side of life men are measured by material standards; the farmer by his land, the merchant by his capital, and the size of every man by his bank account. This life is vital to human existence and is good as far as it goes. It is the stepping-stone from savagery to civilization. Its power for evil begins only when it usurps the place of higher things and claims to be the whole of life, forgetting that man is an animal plus a soul, a spirit of Divine capacities and possibilities. The great words in his speech are not bread, business, and pleasure, but conscience, character, and God. It is startling to recall that our Lord was more afraid of the perils of riches than the perils of poverty. The brimming cup of prosperity is not easily carried. Many who once rejoiced in domestic happiness when the income was small have lived to have that happiness wrecked and their homes ruined through increase of wealth. Success often dulls the finer edge of the soul. Imperceptibly men lose the capacity for enjoying the satisfactions of simplicity through yielding to the cravings of diseased appetites that remain unsatisfied. The life that shows increase in material things alone is ill developed, and an ill-developed life is in danger of being wholly ruined.

But men may say with perfect truth that they seek wealth for the sake of their children and not for themselves. But if a man, for the sake of leaving wealth to his children, has failed to be their true friend and guide, he will leave but a poor heritage. Better to give them, through example and fellowship, clear moral vision and steadfastness of purpose, and a sense of responsibility that will make their lives on earth safe and blessed in noble service for lofty ends. Some one has called the young people who have been thus well equipped for self-indulgence and ill-equipped for self-discipline the dangerous classes; and for those who can read aright there is perhaps no more ominous sign than the increase of their number by long prosperity.

¶ Our Lord in the parable called the Rich Fool sets before us this man as a warning of the danger of those who trust in this world's goods as a source of blessedness. Nothing is said against this man's character. Not a word as to his having procured his wealth by any unjust means. Indeed, the fact that a rich farmer was chosen as an illustration, suggests the honest and laborious processes by which his wealth was acquired. The sun, the rain, and all the forces of Nature contributed to his increasing wealth. His selfishness appears in that he calls the fruits his own; 'my fruits and my goods,' he says. But while he made plans for satisfying the flesh, he utterly neglected the higher wants of his soul, and when the curtain fell he went out into the unknown future, leaving all for which he lived behind.

3. *In the Christian Life.*—The point of the prophet's charge to the chosen people was that they were only half and half: half Jews and half Gentiles; worshipping at the altar of Jehovah, and yet mixing with idolaters. The Church still contains many such one-sided Christians. They are half and half in Christian character and conduct; half in the Church and half in the world; confessing the name of Christ in the Church and then denying Him in the world. 'I would thou wert cold or hot.' It is

thorough work that is enthusiastic and easy work. Let us get our whole heart and life into Christian service, and this will make us strong and happy. Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind—not half a saint and half a worldling.

¶ Mr Bagehot speaks of 'those *unabsorbed*, purposeless, divided characters which seem to puzzle us. They complicate human life, and they do so the more effectually that they typify and represent so much of what every man feels and must feel within himself. In each man there is so much which is unmoral, so much which has nothing to do with hell or heaven; which occupies a middle place not recognized in any theology; which is hateful both to the impetuous "friends of God" and His most eager enemies.'

So flaps my helpless sail,
  Bellying with neither gale
    Of Heaven
Nor Orcus even.[1]

Christian character is constantly in danger of being one-sided. Character is a complex thing and is the sum of many habits, a web of many strands. It is the symmetrical development and harmonious blending of all these elements that make the perfect character. But we are more or less defective and deformed. It is a fine thing to have knowledge and zeal well balanced; yet those who have knowledge are often cool and indifferent as to action, and those who burn with zeal may be lacking in wisdom. Conscience and charity are two elements that ought not to be separated. Loyalty to our own convictions ought always to be tempered with toleration for the convictions of others. Put conscience and zeal on one side of a man's character and put no wisdom and charity on the other side to match them, and we have a cake not turned, a one-sided man who may do good, but also much harm. So one may be orthodox in creed and heterodox in conduct, upright yet uncharitable, self-controlled yet selfish.

The Christian should be, not a one-sided, defective and deformed character, but a full-rounded man. The good name of God is partly in our keeping. To fail in expressing religion through winsome and elevating daily conduct is to manifest an ill-developed life. But it is the message of God, through the Old Testament and the New, that there is healing for every disordered life. A man's condition need not remain like that of the unturned scone. If we take Christ seriously we will discover in Him the permanent remedy for the ill-developed life. Did He not come that we might have life—abundant life?

Unconscious Decay

Hos. vii. 9.—'Gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not.'

Hosea sees his country hastening to disaster. Israel had been separated from the nations that it might be holy to Jehovah. They were a people destined to dwell alone, but they had swerved from their destiny. They had mingled with the heathen, learned their works, and served their idols. This association with the surrounding nations was injurious to them in several respects, but chiefly it had eaten out their moral strength. And the tragic element in the situation was that they were unconcerned and unconscious of their condition. The weakness was unsuspected. 'Gray hairs,' says the prophet, 'are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not.' In this homely and memorable figure we see the signs of decay.

This suggests to us the possibility of an unconscious loss in life: we may lose our most precious possessions unawares. Let us recognize that there is such a possibility. When the wind blows down a tree, the gap in the wood is perfectly visible. When, under stress of some big temptation, a man flings away his honour, or puts his hand to some crime, the fact is one that cannot very well be hidden. His loss is one that all can see, and he cannot be ignorant of it himself. But there are other agencies of destruction than tempests; there is, for example, dry rot, a decay that works silently and insidiously month after month, till the fabric that looks so sound is as frail as tinder and will collapse at a touch. It is against that sort of unrecognized deterioration that our text stands as a warning.

¶ Henry Drummond tells of the devastating havoc of the white ant, that works unseen until its ruinous assault has wrecked the infested structure. 'One may never see the insect, possibly, in the flesh, for it lives underground; but its ravages confront one at every turn. You build your house, perhaps, and for a few months fancy you have pitched upon the one solitary site in the country where there are no white ants. But one day suddenly the door-post totters, and lintel and rafter come down together with a crash. You look at a section of the wrecked timbers, and discover that the whole inside is eaten clean away. The apparently solid logs of which the rest of the house is built are now mere cylinders of bark, and through the thickest of them you can push your little finger.'[1]

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[1] Francis Thompson.

¶ When Solomon's temple was being built, we are told that there was no sound of hammer or axe or any tool of iron heard. It was reared in silence. Even so silently can a man's faith and his highest ideals decay and vanish. He may hear nothing, and see nothing, and yet, without sound of hammer, the temple may be coming down.

1. We may note some of the signs when religious faith begins to decline, when the force, freshness, and joyousness of spiritual life are on the wane. These peculiar signs indicate the beginning of the evil. They are not numerous and obtrusive, but the grey hairs are 'here and there,' requiring attention ere we are aware of them.

(1) There is, for instance, the growth of the critical temper. A certain critical attitude is proper and desirable. 'Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.' But there is a temper of criticism that is no sign of health. There is an increasing eagerness to criticize the Church, once the object of their love and allegiance, and to find fault with its members and methods; also a growing readiness to criticize the Scriptures, to think and speak of them doubtfully and depreciatingly. 'Your tongue hath muttered perverseness,' declared Isaiah. They did not begin with frank, outspoken, audacious infidelities, but with 'mutterings' of perverseness. In the fifth verse of this chapter Hosea accuses the people of outspoken and defiant unbelief: 'he stretched out his hand with scorners.' That was the ending, but the beginning was the hinted dislike, the cool acquiescence, the captious criticism. When we begin to lend an ear to tales about our friend, to take exception to acts and ways of his which are really indifferent, to call him to account for trifles, our affection is unquestionably growing cold. The habit of criticism grows as faith declines. Little by little we lose our warm loyalty to our Lord, and little by little we decline into godlessness and worldliness. There is a growing deadness of nerve, a creeping paralysis which leaves us more and more untouched and unmoved by the high and glorious things of our faith.

(2) An elastic conscience is a symptom, too, of decay. Hosea saw in Ephraim luxury, profligacy, licence, and idolatry—things learned from the pagan. In this direction, too, must we watch for signs of degeneration. There may be no overt act of iniquity, whilst the process of deterioration is still going on. It is sometimes said concerning a Christian man, he is not so particular as he used to be. But it is a serious thing indeed when we cease to be as particular as we once were in matters of character and conduct. Of course men may grow into a larger freedom of life so far as immaterial things are concerned. They come to see more clearly what is spiritual and essential, and are not so rigid about observances and forms which once seemed matters of obligation. Such carefulness might in the earlier stages of religious experience and character be of real advantage; but just as flowers and trees maturing in the sun dispense with stakes and cords, so the strengthening soul renounces habits which were helpful in its initial stages. It is a sign of real progress, a source of pure delight, to gain this larger liberty of thought and life. But relaxation of conscience is an altogether different matter. A growing soul feels more and more the supreme claims of righteousness.

(3) Another ominous sign is the way the world—its ambitions, friendships and pleasures—bulks so largely in our thoughts. These grey hairs upon the spiritual life may be only so incipient as yet as to be seen by no other eye but God's. That diminished sensitiveness of the evil of sin within the heart; that lessening regard for the attractiveness of Christ, and for the claims of charity among men; that cooling of the heart towards the operations and interests of the Christian Church; that neglect of secret prayer—these are things which only God and ourselves may know about. But if we are not careful this thing will spread, till it will be only too apparent to all that we are no longer the man or woman we once were.

Our material goods may be totalling up and comforts increasing, but we may be growing poorer and more straitened in spirit. We do well to recall the warning of Keble lest

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[1] *Tropical Africa*, 131.

We barter life for pottage ; sell true bliss
  For wealth or power, for pleasure or renown ;
Thus, Esau-like, our Father's blessing miss,
  Then wash with fruitless tears our faded crown.

¶ An ancient legend tells that Death and a man once made a bargain. They agreed that Death would not come unheralded, and the man would have intimation before the assault of the king of terrors. One day, to his amazement, Death confronted the man. He protested. No notice had been given ! No warning had been sent ! 'No warning given ? Your locks are grey ! Your eyes are dim ! Your limbs are feeble ! Your step is tottering !—These are Death's heralds.' Grey hairs were here and there upon him, yet he knew it not.

2. How can any man resist the reminder of grey hairs ? one may ask. Readily enough. We know what they sometimes do in real life. They make a jest of them, or pull them out, or worse still, dye them black or brown again. If only, when ideals or faith departed, they left a gap behind them, men might realize their loss, and remedy it before it was too late. But the truth is that the vacant space is nearly always filled with something else, with some lower thing that hides the loss from observation. The rich farmer in Christ's parable had laid up much goods for many years. His full barns pleased the eye, and he knew not that, in filling them, he had lost his own soul. For, bit by bit, these barns of his had come to occupy the place where his soul once dwelt. That is where the tragedy lay.

There are very few men who will admit that they have gone back in the spirit-life. They look approvingly on the easy tolerance and the wide charity that now distinguish them, and they say that they have only grown more broad-minded. There is such a thing, of course. But it has also to be kept in mind that tolerance may be the result, not of knowing more, but of caring less. The man who winces at the name of Christ has something also to say for himself. He has grown in reverence, he considers. He does not like to hear that name lightly introduced. And, again, there is a sufficient semblance of truth in what he says to cover up the real fact that the thought of Christ does not mean for him now what it once meant, long before the grey hairs came. Let us fear above all things the loss of the keen edge from conscience, the slackening of allegiance to Christ, and the dimming of our sense for the things that abide for ever. In a supreme moment we may be tempted and fall. We may, in some quick crisis, do despite to the highest that we know. Such failures, however, sad as they are, are not fatal. But to let our conscience be eaten away by the slow assault of daily life, to be minutely false to our highest so often that it steals away unnoticed, and our highest becomes a low worldly thing, to have been a man with a soul and a divine end in life, and to come to be content with 'thou hast much goods laid up for many years'—than that there is no fate worse.

But is that all that the gospel has to say to the grey-haired ? No indeed. It tells of a renewal of the principle of life within, such a strengthening of the vital forces at their fount as shall make itself felt throughout our whole being. It tells of one who can give strength to efface all that in the past was strong against us and power to gain victory on the field of former failure. 'Lord to whom can we go but unto thee ? Thou hast the words of eternal life.'

The Notes of the Trumpet

Hos. viii. 1.—'Set the trumpet to thy mouth.'

1. *The Note of Warning.*—How often in these Hebrew Scriptures we hear that same curt, almost desperate cry, as from a panting runner with only enough breath to gasp it out. These old days were unquiet times, with danger all too often lurking in the darkness, for one never knew when one's hereditary enemy might not be upon the move in some grim raid, the success of which depended on its unexpectedness ; when life was all a nervousness, with watchmen upon many a hill, intent, alert, staring out fixedly ahead. And to them now and then there would burst in a desperate creature, barely escaped with life and nothing more, shouting, 'Set the trumpet to your lips, sound the alarm, the foe is here ! '

That note of alarm recurs so continually through the whole of the Old Testament that there is hardly a prophet who does not use this metaphor. The sense of impending disaster lies heavy on their minds; they have heard God crying to them, 'Sound the alarm!' and they ring it out over the world. That is what makes them prophets. Beware! beware! beware! so they keep calling. The times are out of joint, things have gone wrong, grave danger is upon us. Fools that we are! we have been living complacently in sin, and now who can save us from what is already on the march against us? 'The lion has roared,' cries Amos. Run, run! for it does so only when crouched for the spring. 'The trumpet has sounded, who will not fear?' 'The eagle has swooped,' shouts Hosea, terror in his eyes; sound the alarm, if indeed it be not too late already. The whole north country, Jeremiah breaks out, is like a seething cauldron boiling over. 'Set the trumpet to your lips, sound the alarm.' But no one ever was so urgent as our Lord. It is, indeed, the custom of our time to evade and ignore His warnings; to leave unread these grave passages that make the Gospels the sternest book in the world. There are people who are made uneasy by our Lord's severity: who would explain away that scourging of the unclean things out of God's temple, as if Christ is ever kinder than when His lash falls sore upon us, as if anything even in Him is so splendid and adorable as that loyalty of His that will risk losing this heart of ours for which He gave so much, but will not let it peacefully settle down in sin, nor make pretence He does not see what is unworthy in us, but insists upon warning us with a fearful, gracious bluntness. Whether we like them or not, the words are there, red-hot, tremendous, not yet cooled with all the passing of the centuries. No one in all the ages ever blew so clear a blast of warning as our Lord.

That is a note almost entirely absent from the pulpit in our day. We have grown finically polite and composed and unexcited. There is no terror in our voice, no urgency in our pleading. 'Cry aloud, spare not,' demands Isaiah, 'lift up your voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgressions, and Israel their sins.' Whereat we shrinkingly utter a shocked protest. Sins! But is not that a rather vulgar subject? In any case, people have to be coaxed to church these days; and if you were to meet them with such heavy stodgy stuff as that, you would scare them away. Moreover, have not things been much exaggerated? Are we not all in a process of evolution, which is gradually lifting us up above ourselves, and these unfortunate episodes will naturally and in course of time be left behind? Meanwhile we need not worry: it is just a kind of measles, a childish ailment that we will outgrow, annoying certainly, but not, in most cases, really dangerous! Whitman tells us that sometimes he feels that he would like to go and live with the cattle. They are so placid and content. Not one of them, he notices with approval, lies awake at night and weeps for its sins. If that be the ideal, certainly we are doing well, for as a generation we have reached an acme of bovine placidity. But really it is, of course, a sign of smallness, not of strength. It was when Father Damien happened to let boiling water spill over his foot and felt no pain, that he realized with horror that he was a leper. And this insensibility of ours is a bad symptom. For one thing it implies that we have no spiritual ambition, else we could not be satisfied with such poor lives; that we cannot have thought out the fact of Jesus Christ, and how immeasurably He has raised the standard. Every one remembers that terrific passage in which Newman urges that it were better that the whole world died in extremest physical agony, than that one cheap lie be told, or one poor farthing stolen. At which we look at him as at a man pouring out empty words with no real meaning. For the Cross, showing us as nothing else can do how dreadful are these sins of ours of which we think so lightly, has by some strange mental perversity made us feel greatly easier in our minds—like those unhappy wretches Bunyan saw lying in deep slumber in its shadow, who would not be warned of their danger, but pointing drowsily upward, turned over and confidently fell fast asleep again, and were lost upon Calvary. Sometimes Christ's heart cried out in agony because, while He was here, eager to save every one and with no thought toward any except kindness, some, He saw, were worse for Him, not better; in a more deadly plight than if He had not come at all, because still sinning as before, but now against a clearer light. That is a pain one fears many are causing Him to-day.

¶ 'It is not kind,' says Unamuno, 'to rock and lull one's fellows to the drowsiness of matter; one should rouse them to the uneasiness and torment of spirit. To the fourteen works of mercy learned in the catechism we should add one more, the duty of awaking the sleeper.'

2. *The Note of Heartening.*—But the trumpet was not only the instrument of impending doom or danger, far from that! Often its thrilling notes were used to rally and steady, to stir tired hearts to one more valiant effort when every one else had broken, and thrown down their arms, and made abject surrender. It would appear that when Israel, rousing itself from defeat, went out against her enemies, the priest of God was there, with the trumpet in his hand, to put grit and courage into men, to fire their blood, inciting them with its heady notes to gallantry and daring. And that surely is a first duty of the pulpit still; and of all of us to one another in this difficult world, where most people are much harder pressed than we would credit. We all must see to it that we adopt views that will hearten, not discourage, those about us; that we so speak, so act, so bear ourselves, so look out upon life, as to make others surer of God, as Erskine of Linlathen always seemed to bring Him nearer, more able to hold out bravely, because they have caught the infection of our courage. We are the officers, we Christian men and women; it is for us to set the standard, and to rally others. To dispirit and depress another is a serious breach of the King's Regulations.

¶ In the spring of 1631 a vessel, the *Charles*, Captain Luke Fox, went from British shores to seek the North Pole. Among the articles of the ship's company, to which each sailor subscribed, one was to the effect that no man should speak any despairing word against the good success of the voyage, 'or make any doubt thereof.'[1]

¶ 'In the dark perils of war,' says Trevelyan of an officer whose buoyant audacity played a noble part in the Mutiny, 'in the high places of the field, hope shone in him like a pillar of fire, when it had gone out in all the others.'

But the greatest Master here as elsewhere is still Jesus Christ, with His amazing power of rousing hope in desperate people, that rings out its challenge to our past with all its shame and failure, crying to us, 'Up again, up again! you can still do it, and you will!' Randolph, the English ambassador, wrote down to London that the Scottish Reformation would have fizzled out, had it not been for Knox. But his voice, so ran the dispatch, 'is able in one hour to putt more lyf in us than fyve hundred trumpets continually blustering at once in our ears.' And Christ's voice has brought untold myriads of cowed and beaten things up to their feet again, with brave eyes and big and valiant hearts. And under Him we are the officers; it is for us to keep the others steady: to believe when others falter, to be calm when they grow flustered and uneasy, and take to looking back across their shoulders. Whoever gives, we cannot falter. Rather, as Patmore says:

Under the ever-changing clouds of doubt,
When others cry,
The stars, if stars there were,
Are quenched and out!
To him, uplooking to the hills for aid,
Appear at need displayed,
Gaps in the low-hung gloom, and, bright in air,
Orion or the Bear.

3. *The Note of Victory.*—The trumpet was used, so it appears, on days of victory and rejoicing. In the Kings we read how many things were restored to the Temple, yet, it is added sadly, there was no trumpet for the house of the Lord. That is a sorrowful lack: if it be wanting, then the worship is inadequate indeed. Yet we do not hear it often these days. 'Victory, victory, victory!' cried Ralph Erskine, and died—a fine ending, to burst into God with that shout of triumph. That surely is the spirit in which we should live, in which they did live in the Testament. It is the happiest thing in literature: there is a sound of singing in it everywhere; not melancholious hymns, like some of those made in mediæval cells, all a-chittering of teeth for very cold, a dreariness of desolation lit by a wan hope that it seems not unlikely may go out; nor sentimental rubbish like much modern stuff, enough to drive any manly nature from us altogether. These people really sang, for very gladness, because they had something to sing about. And so have we, if we would but believe it. It is difficult to understand why the Church is always apologizing, always speaking deprecatingly, even depreciatingly, about its work. Has there ever been a religious conference held since the days of Hesiod in which lugubrious

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[1] Alexander Smellie.

voices were not chanting dolefully in unison, 'Would God we had lived in earlier or later times, the golden days, for ours is the age of brass!' It is the worst possible psychology. Tell yourself a thing often enough and you will come to believe it. Why are we not exulting in the incredible triumphs of the faith? We ought to be the gladdest and the most exultant people in the world; for we have found the key to our difficulties, and it turns; have come on a solution of life's problems, and it works. 'We are able,' cry the excited people in the Testament; and so are we.

¶ Mr Chesterton, replying to the gibe that the Salvation Army is a corybantic type of Christianity, asserts that its methods are unchallengeable; 'for,' says he, 'every real Christian who believes in his faith must do two things: he will dance, and he will fight; dance, for sheer happiness; make war because he has discovered something that is irresistible, and opens a sure path to triumph.'

But is this triumphant faith ours? We say, of course, it is, but always in the back of our minds we have the feeling that not much can come of it; that it is wiser not to test it seriously; and so the Church keeps drifting into agreement with the favourite remark of that old mixture, Lord Melbourne, 'Better try to do no good, then you'll get into no scrapes'; in which saying there lies much cynical knowledge of life, but no faith at all. Look at the people of the Testament, what splendid hopes they nursed, what audacious visions their eyes saw, what incredible victories they gained! They were a poor little company, gathered here and there into some garret of a dull back street; nobody noticed them, yet they were sure that all the kingdoms of the world would become Jesus Christ's, saw a great heaven, vast and wide and immeasurable, with twelve gates never shut by night or day, for from all quarters crowds were always pouring in, from every corner of the world. What they themselves had experienced in Christ made them feel anything was possible. That is the mood that wins.

Up, up, up and up!
Face your game, and play it!
The night is past, behold the sun!
The idols fall, the lie is done!
The Judge is set, the doom begun!
Who can stay it?

The Conditions of Conversion

Hos. x. 12.—'Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.'

That we cannot radically change our nature from evil to good is generally allowed, and by revelation made emphatic; but the same revelation uniformly teaches that we can do much toward bringing about the desired conversion. In secular matters human co-operation is essential if God's gifts and purposes are to be fully realized, and our spiritual life is subject to the same law. Only as we observe certain given conditions can we hope to apprehend the salvation of God. We are not directed to wait until irresistible grace forces us into the Kingdom, but to begin and act toward that higher life which we are assured is within our grasp. Sincere action on our part is indispensable if we are to realize the security and blessedness of the Christian life.

What, then, can we do with a view to our salvation? There is a twofold preparation for the blessing, an inward and an external one.

1. *The Interior Preparation.*—'Break up your fallow ground.' Begin in right earnest to evoke the religiousness of your nature, use the grace already in you, cultivate those yearnings and promptings of the soul, so long neglected, so long resisted. A recent writer on South America gives a very clear account of what is meant by 'fallow ground.' 'Failure to improve the land by agriculture is general. There are thousands upon thousands of acres where the dank grass, thistles, and the poison weed flourish luxuriantly, smothering a small, struggling undergrowth of good grass. But the farmer will point with pride to weeds and thistles as proof of the richness of the land. It is curiously typical of the "Oriental" mind to allow the quality of his rich soil to remain proved by the vigour of its weed-crop year after year.'[1] Is not this a vivid reflection of the way in which thousands content themselves with the surface of their personality, whilst altogether neglecting the underlying spiritual nature, with all its potential powers and riches? We discipline the body, are proud of its energy and comeli-

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[1] J. O. P. Bland, *Men, Manners, and Morals in South America.*

ness; we cultivate the intellect, eliciting its resources, vain of its achievements; for the sake of social distinction and practical success we make many sacrifices; yet all the while the deeper self, with its far greater possibilities, is strangely forgotten.

There is a great deal of religion in an unconverted man. We hear much to-day respecting a region of our nature that is known as 'the subconscious,' where mental processes go on outside or below consciousness. Subtle thoughts, impressions, reasonings, apprehensions, desires, and prejudices are discerned by flashes; and although the origin and fermentation of it all are mainly in the dark, outside knowledge, control, and volition, we must believe that finally our decisions and character are materially influenced from this source. Is not this the realm in which prevenient grace operates; in which the light that enlightens every man that cometh into the world, dawns; in which the Spirit of God works, giving to the soul a secret bias to truth and righteousness, strengthening it to follow?

William James is certainly correct when he writes: 'In the matter of conversion I am quite willing to believe that a new truth may be supernaturally revealed to a subject when he really *asks*. But I am sure that in many cases of conversion it is less a new truth than a power gained over life by a truth always known.' The truth is there, but a bedridden truth. The conscience is already alive, accusing, or excusing. The affections are often strangely warmed toward the Giver of all good. And a Divine energy renders the will capable of determination to the obedience of the faith.

'Break up the fallow ground,' so full of virtue and promise. Set yourself to realize this long-neglected prairie land so rich with possibilities. Respond to the urgencies of the soul. 'Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name.' It would seem as though the Psalmist had some inkling of the 'subconscious'; and he summons the faculties and forces 'within' him, an invisible choir, to join in the universal music of adoration. He who would lead a new life must follow this example. He must begin with what God has already done for him and in him. He must recognize, welcome, cherish, stimulate, all that belongs to the deeper life, and that already is stirring there.

2. *The External Reformation.*—There can be no real, no solid conversion, except as we first evince our sincerity by putting from us every known sin. The traveller in South America just quoted tells us of 'acres where thistles and the poison weed flourish luxuriantly, smothering a small, struggling undergrowth of good grass.' So, though the understanding is convinced, the conscience troubled, the heart made penitent and sorrowful by the action of the Spirit, all is vain whilst any iniquity is tolerated in the life. The struggling undergrowth of good desires, strivings, purposes, are smothered, choked, strangled by any allowed fault in conduct. 'Their doings,' says Hosea, 'will not suffer them to turn unto their God.' The teaching of the New Testament is invariably to this effect. One known sin deliberately retained means the forfeiture of every blessing of the covenant. Do any object—

Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
  O Lamb of God, I come!

Yes, even so; but our contention remains in full force. The Prodigal came to his father's house just as he was; nevertheless he forsook the far country, the harlots, and the swine. Christian could not cleanse his filthy rags nor free his burden; yet he turned his back upon the guilty companionships and pleasures of the City of Destruction. If we would enjoy the great salvation Christ came to secure, we must remember the Baptist's exhortation to 'bring forth fruits meet for repentance.'

Let none think it an easy thing to comply with this condition. In the *Inferno* Dante entered a gloomy wood, where he found men changed into trees; and when the poet unwittingly broke off a little spray from one of them, the trunk cried, 'Why dost thou mangle me?' whilst from that splinter 'issued forth together both words and blood'—a graphic picture of the anguish of awakened and resolute penitents as they tear from them the sins which tyrannize and destroy the soul.

¶ Dr Samuel Johnson found that the drinking of wine was a snare to him, and, although inordinately fond of the indulgence, he became a total abstainer. At the banquets he attended, and almost made immortal, he only drank water whilst the rest drank wine. On those festive occasions there sat with him some of the greatest men England has known—Oliver Goldsmith, the most charming of authors; Sir Joshua Reynolds, a prince of painters; Edmund Burke, the philosophic statesman; David Garrick, whose 'death eclipsed the gaiety of nations'; and several other illustrious characters; yet it always seems to me that Johnson drinking water was the grandest figure of them all; not for his intellectual qualities, remarkable as these were, but on account of his sterling heroism. It may be said that he showed his weakness, and he did; but his bodily infirmity served only as the background for his moral grandeur. He dared openly to take his inferior self boldly by the throat and cast it under the table; in so doing he exhibited a courage surpassing all military prowess and glory.[1]

And yet how light are the conditions of salvation compared with the great salvation itself! Think of the riches of the new life in Christ! 'Reap in mercy.' 'Till he come and rain righteousness upon you.' According to the measure or proportion of mercy shall God grant to the penitent soul the gifts of grace. This is the glorious standard of blessing. Thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold spring from the seeds sown in the fields; and in the moral sphere God refreshes and enriches us beyond all our thoughts. He blesses, not according to our merits, prayers, or expectations, but according to the freeness and largeness of His mercy. He shall make us wiser, stronger, holier, happier, more useful, beyond all that we can ask or think. Broken up, that fallow ground shall bear golden harvests.

Cords of a Man

Hos. xi. 4.—'I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them.'

The two figures in this passage express the thought of a special providence which had watched over Israel's past, a providence which had been continuous, beginning with them in their youth and going with them right up to years of manhood. In the earliest days of all God taught the nation to walk, holding it by the arms, with patience and affection, as a mother teaches her child, encouraging him, but not too quickly lest he should overtask his strength; and when he falls taking him up in her arms, comforting him and healing him. And then, as the nation grew strong and could walk, and like a child now grown to manhood was set tasks and had to bend to serious burdens, like the oxen which did all the draught-work in Palestine, the figure changes from that of a loving father or mother teaching a child to that of a considerate master driving a team of oxen. A kind waggoner is thoughtful about his beasts, seems to enter sympathetically into any special difficulty of the road, goes to their head and with a word and a touch makes them feel that he is not neglectful. The yoke, in the case of draught-oxen, is fixed over the brow near the horns, and so comes down over the jaws. The merciful driver eases the yoke where it bites the cheeks, and by his encouraging touch gets them over hard places; and when the time of rest comes, slips the yoke off their jaws that they may eat their meat easily. When Israel was grown up and had to carry heavy burdens, which is the lot of all men, God was to them as a considerate Master, never leaving them, making them feel that He was with them through it all, setting them to the tasks, and gently leading them, and strenuously upholding them, treating them with human sympathy, drawing them with cords of a man, with bands of love.

They are homely figures of a father with the patience of love towards his little child, and of a waggoner with the kindness of sympathy towards his labouring cattle; but what figures could be more expressive of the thought which Hosea is seeking to express of the constant loving providence of God? To the understanding heart, God's love was seen to be brooding over Israel's past: it and it alone was the explanation of their history: and it is the explanation even of the severe discipline which the prophet predicted for the disobedient children, the unruly heifers which Israel had become. His love faileth never. Out of the darkness, which was settling down over the apostate people, comes a voice, a passionate, pleading voice, a voice from the very heart of the Eternal, the voice of exhaustless love that cannot be worn out. 'How can I give thee up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender thee, O Israel? My heart is turned within me. I am melted with sympathy.' He would still as of old, still even at the eleventh hour, draw them with cords of a man, with bands of love.

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[1] W. L. Watkinson, *The Fairness of Trial*, 182.

1. Is not this explanation of Israel's history the true reading of our own experience? The secret of all God's dealings with us is love. Surely we see this now as we look back, and recall each separate stage. If we have any spiritual insight we must see that God has been in all our life, loving us from earliest days, teaching us first by instinctive faith, with the care and patience of a father; accepting from us childish almost unconscious trust, though we may not have known that He healed us. 'I girded thee, though thou didst not know me.' And then when the burden of life came upon us, when we had to bend our neck to the yoke like labouring cattle, He made us strong by the assurance of His sympathy. Even in the experience that was hardest to understand, one day it comes to us with the force of a revelation that God has been teaching and training us. It is this that makes the religious man, and distinguishes him from the irreligious. Upon all men are laid the trials and tasks of life; to all men come the burden and the yoke. To most it comes in the form of work, the daily routine and drudgery. In what are we different from the draught-oxen that plod with their load? In what so good, if they know their master and respond to his word and move to his touch? It is here is seen the inspiring power of religion, the sense of carrying the burdens for God, that, like the waggoner to his team, He has set us to the work, and given us the task. There is no other way of ennobling work from drudgery, and consecrating life into service. We are not dumb, driven cattle who can understand nothing but the lash; we are instead co-workers with God, and He becomes as a man beside us, with gentle sympathy and helpful kindness.

¶ In Millet's "Angelus" we see the toil-worn peasants, who have been bending over the ground through the long afternoon, standing up from their work to think reverently and prayerfully of God, as the notes of the evening bell come floating over the fields from the dim church tower. And we, too, may hear a Divine voice, clear and sweet as the sound of the Angelus-bell, reminding us that life's labours are part of God's service, and that He is with us in the work of the common day.

Thy burden is God's gift,
And it will make the bearer calm and strong;
Yet, lest it press too heavily and long,
He says, 'Cast it on Me,
And it shall easy be.'

And those who heed His voice,
And seek to give it back in trustful prayer,
Have quiet hearts that never can despair,
And hope lights up the way
Upon the darkest day.

It is the lonely road
That crushes out the light and life of heaven;
But borne with Him, the soul restored, forgiven,
Sings out through all the days
Her joy and God's high praise.[1]

2. If it were possible for a man to so walk with God his Master, and for God to so condescend to man His creature, would it not transform the world to the man, making duty light, and rough places smooth, and flooding all life with grace and beauty? If it were possible! That it is possible is a fact of religious experience. The whole Bible is the revelation of God as precisely that, declaring His desire for man to be that, asserting the possibility of that. Hosea saw the past history of Israel to be the very romance of Divine love. It was the key to explain all His dealing with them, from their childhood right on through the long years of training. The revelation of God's Divinity has been a revelation of His humanity, drawing them with the cords of a man, with bands of love.

How much more clearly should the Christian Church see this than even Hosea, after the greatest of all object-lessons in Jesus Christ! The story of His wonderful life, full of compassion and human sympathy, the grace and truth of His lips, the pity and tenderness of His deeds, His life for love, and death for love, through it all does He not draw us with cords of a man? If in Christ we have a revelation of the Father, if Jesus stands to us for God, how in the face of all that He was and did can we doubt the eternal love of God? The whole story thrills with human tenderness, with human sympathy, sympathy with men in their joy and their sorrow, sympathy with the little child, and with all on whom the yoke pressed, the labouring and heavy-laden. And in the last great scene of all, which culminated in the Cross, it is as the voice of exhaustless love which Hosea utters: 'How can I give thee up, my son Ephraim, whom I taught to walk holding by the arms? How can I surrender thee, Israel?' If the blood of Abel cries from the ground, shall not the blood of Christ cry from the Cross for response to deathless love, and can it cry in vain?

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[1] J. R. Miller.

The cords of a man, how feeble they are, and easily evaded; the bands of love, how gently they imprison; a stroke can snap them. Yet the world knows no fetters that can grapple so tight. The cords are steel; the bands are adamant. God comes to us in Christ with a more heart-searching appeal than even the words of Hosea could describe. He comes to us in terms of what we ourselves are. We have no excuse for not knowing God, if He can be known through Jesus; and that He can be known through Jesus is a fact of Christian experience. He does not stand afar off, but stands close beside us, laying a human hand upon us, calling us by a human voice, very man of very man, touching us in the place of our affections, breaking us by His Divine sacrifice, melting us by His human compassion, claiming us for His love's sake, drawing us by the cords of a man, holding us by the bands of love.

Why do you so clasp me,
And draw me to your knee?
Forsooth, you do but chafe me,
I pray you let me be:
I will but be loved now and then
When it liketh me!

So I heard a young child,
A thwart child, a young child
Rebellious against love's arms,
Make its peevish cry.

To the tender God I turn:—
'Pardon, Love most High!
For I think those arms were even Thine,
And that child even I.'[1]

The Power of Words

Hos. xiv. 2.—'Take with you words.'

This text at first sight appears startlingly defective as a guide to men who would approach their God. Micah speaks otherwise—'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' In the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah we have a still more elaborate demand for various services toward the unfortunate, as the only terms on which God will consent to man's approach. But here we read, 'Take with you—words!'

Words are often supposed to be futile things, and contrasted with deeds. It was Carlyle who identified the two, 'Cast forth thy Act, thy Word, into the ever-living, ever-working universe'; and, indeed, if they be the genuine expressions of the truth, they are never futile, but always charged with vital energy. Dr Denney has said, regarding St Paul's exhortation, 'comfort one another with these words,' that here the Apostle is balancing the greatest sorrow of life against words, but then they are words of eternal life. Such words are not the alternative to character, but the expression of character; nay, they are part of what forms character and fixes it.

Three things are manifest as to the power of words in our religious experience.

1. *What they imply—a view of intercourse with God.*—Hosea has idolatry in mind as he writes this chapter, and the superstitious ritual of Israel's temple-worship. The two had this in common that they were founded on a non-rational conception of worship. The worshipper had in neither case any clear idea of the meaning of the service he performed. Indeed, it was characteristic of Semitic thought that such ideas were not necessary in the least. What was required was the performance of certain acts and the giving of certain offerings. The god who could prescribe and accept such worship was, so far as his intercourse with men went, essentially irrational. Either he was incapable of rational intercourse, a mere mass of prejudices backed by supernatural powers; or he was unwilling for it, holding himself apart from his creatures in a haughty superiority which demanded homage, but despised them

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[1] Francis Thompson.

too thoroughly to be further interested in their affairs.

But here was a new conception of God. He cared not for mysteries, but for meanings. He called them back from formalities to the simplicity and reality of speech. When men worship God, rational beings are in communion, and worship is the converse of mind with mind. This is a God who can be spoken with, and from whom men may count on an intelligent and patient hearing. With such a God simplicity and sincerity are easy, for we are sure of being understood. Therefore awe must not rob us of trust and of directness. For our worship we should indeed prepare ourselves by selecting our choicest thoughts; but we should bring to God also our worst and most deplorable, nay, even our most casual and unimportant. For this is not a recitation, it is an intercourse.

2. *What words reveal—the truth about oneself.*—It is for want of bringing our secret life to expression that we are so often self-deceived. All idol-worshippers and mere performers of a religious office come back from their devotions with their illusions undispelled. Those who would leave their illusions behind them must take with them words. For it is our own words that we have to bring, the words that have first been 'spoken in the inner man.'

¶ 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' said the publican, the words coming in a gasp, and then he fell back into silence; but these words, which were all he had, were true words, with the blood of his heart in them. Do not pose before God, nor try to put yourself into a religious attitude. Speak what words are natural and true, and no others. Say that you are glad, and life is good and full of love; or say, 'Thy ways seem cruel to me, and the pressure of Thy hand too hard.' Say 'Oh Lord, I love Thee, yet I love Thee not'; 'Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief.' Say, if you must, 'Except I see in His hands the print of the nails, I will not believe.'

Thus speech is an ordeal, and the command of the text implies self-examination. What words have we to bring? The answer will reveal what words are natural to us, and so will be a test of our growth or declension in the life of the spirit. When we try to state to ourselves what we are and what we desire most, we shall find startling revelations. Many states of mind are tolerable only until they are plainly and definitely expressed. The expression will reveal the wealth or poverty of what our hearts want to say, and so will reveal what has been happening in us. Some will find themselves utter strangers in the spiritual region; others will move in it as men walking in their home fields. When you come to words, you will at least know where you are.

3. *What they effect—a transformation of character.*—For this act of worship has the power not only of revealing but of forming character. Words mark the point of change from the unpractical to the practical.

In our inner life much is necessarily vague, consisting of confused masses of feeling, embryonic forms of thoughts, broken ends of ideas hanging loose. Some of these must, of course, be left vague. Yet some are waiting for expression to render them immediately effective. To say a thing which we have hitherto only thought or half-thought, is to give it the force of a part of our active life, to put it in a position to tell definitely upon conduct. When the images of the imagination are focused, and our estimate of self, our sense of sin, and our feeling of need are clearly perceived, action is sure to follow. There is more in the idea of 'making phrases like swords' than a fine figure of speech. In literal truth, 'Bright is the ring of words,' and a spirit that has found its true utterance will be irresistibly urged forward towards conduct. The Prodigal in the story had spent many days and nights in general ideas of repentance, desire, and intention that came to nothing. At last he found the words 'I will arise and go,' and the words brought immediate action—he arose and went.

¶ There are times when words are deeds. It was said of Luther, 'His words were half-battles.' There are crises in life when words are of profound significance. The words of the marriage vow, for example, when 'I will' makes two lives one; the words at some great national crisis, when a great statesman has called the nation to resolution by his wise and thrilling appeals; the words of a poet, when in a few lines harmonies of exquisite thought and music are married in an eternal union, whose fruit is 'a thing of beauty' which is a joy for ever.[1]

Thus religious utterance is one of the great forces that lead to right action. It is in the dreamy brooding silence, when we know not what we do, that we idle and sin. When we begin to stir our minds, to think clear-edged thoughts and pass definite judgments of right and wrong and to pronounce these judgments in speech, our will leaps forward at the sound of the word, and makes for righteousness.

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[1] W. Mackintosh Mackay, *The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets*, 28.

As the Dew

Hos. xiv. 5.—'I will be as the dew unto Israel.'

No one but a poet could have said this. But Hosea was a poet as well as a prophet. His little prophecy is full of similes and illustrations drawn from natural objects; scarcely any of them from cities or from the ways of men; almost all of them from Nature, as seen in the open country, which he evidently loved, and where he had looked upon things with a clear and meditative eye. And here we have this beautiful suggestion of what God means to His people, and of what He does for them: 'I will be as the dew unto Israel.'

We can imagine something of what these words would mean in a land like Palestine where the heat of summer is intense and for months together no rain falls to cool the air and refresh the earth. But for one thing all vegetation would perish, and that thing is the dew. Throughout these rainless months the west wind blows continuously from the Mediterranean. The moisture with which the sea air is charged becomes condensed into a fine white mist when it meets the cold night air upon the land; for in Syria the nights are often as cold as the days are hot. And this mist covers the land with a moisture which refreshes the drooping vegetation and renews its greenness and growth.

Why did the Prophet choose this symbol for God? There must be some points of resemblance between the coming of the dew and the gracious ministry which it fulfils, and the way in which God manifests Himself to His people. Can we gather anything of the Prophet's meaning, then, from this figure which he uses?

1. *God comes in the Stillness.*—How quietly the dew falls upon the grass! Silently, imperceptibly. It makes no noise. And it comes only when all is still. On tempestuous nights there is none of it. When the wind is high among the trees, and the waves are beating upon the shore, and the clouds are driving across the sky, there is no descent of dew. It is when all is at peace—when all the world of Nature is as it were at prayer, and the stars are looking down from the serene and unclouded heavens—that the dew falls, like a benediction, upon plant and flower.

We recall the story in the Old Testament of how God revealed Himself to Elijah. Fleeing for his life into the desert the prophet came to Horeb, and stood in a cave there upon the mountain, and cried to God. 'And, behold, the Lord passed by. And a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still, small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave'—for he knew that God was speaking to him. Wind! earthquake! fire!—Nature's most terrible forces—and God in none of them! But in 'the still, small voice' He came. It is another version of Hosea's words: 'I will be as the dew unto Israel.'

The raging fire, the roaring wind,
  Thy boundless power display;
But in the gentler breeze we find
  Thy Spirit's viewless way.

And then, when you turn from the Old Testament to the New, it is the same truth which is proclaimed. How quietly the Lord Jesus came at Bethlehem! They were expecting Him to come with signs and wonders. They were expecting Him to rend the heavens, but He came so quietly that no one noticed Him! Who would notice a little Child? He came like the dew. And His ministry afterwards, how quiet it was! Thirty years of silence first, in the home at Nazareth and at the carpenter's bench, manifesting forth His glory in the quiet duties of the home. And then, out in the fields and in the villages of Galilee, and down by the lake-side, and in the streets of Jerusalem—how quietly He went about His Father's business! 'Show us a sign,' they said; but He refused them! The axe, the fire, and the winnowing fan—these shall be His signs, said John the Baptist; but even John the Baptist was mistaken. He opened His mouth, and He blessed the people; He gathered the little children into His arms; His words fell like balm upon broken hearts, and He won for Himself the most beautiful of all His titles—'The Friend of sinners.' Then, in what an awful silence He finished His Father's business, and wrought His greatest work of all! What a stillness, the stillness of Calvary! What a mute, and yet what an overwhelming appeal, those outstretched arms!

It is a lesson which we all need to learn, and which we are slow to learn—a lesson about the manner and the method of God. When man sets out to accomplish anything great in this world, it is with stress of body and mind that he does it; but when God sets out to accomplish anything, He does it in the majesty of silence. He comes like the dew.

We are waiting for a revival in the world to-day; we are waiting for God to come and bless His Church; we are waiting for Him to come to our unresponsive, withered hearts, and to refresh them again with His presence. The question is whether we have got the conditions which are required for His coming, whether we have got the atmosphere which He requires and demands. How are we expecting Him to come? We do not forget that there have been times in the history of His Church when He came as He came at Pentecost, with 'rushing mighty wind,' and 'tongues, like as of fire,' but these have been occasional and exceptional. His accustomed manner is the dew. Do not let us wait for the unusual and the exceptional and the sensational. Cultivate the quiet things of the religious life—the quiet things which He Himself has appointed for those who wait for Him—these quiet times of prayer, and of meditation upon His word; these quiet times of reflection and recollection; these quiet and ordinary services of His House; the awful quietness which is around the Cross, when at the Sacrament the bread is broken, as He commanded, in memory of Him. When we have the right atmosphere He will come, and He will bless His people.

2. *God comes in the Darkness.*—It is not when the sun is shining that the dew falls; but when the sun has gone down, and the breath of evening comes, and the curtain of night is drawn: it is then, when all is dark, that the benediction descends.

Surely that is a parable, and we have all proved the truth of it in our own experience. It suggests again the manner of God, the way in which He deals with our souls. It is not when the sun is shining high and resplendent in our sky—when all is going well with us in the world—that we generally receive our chiefest blessings, and get our greatest spiritual enrichments from God; but when our sun has gone down for a season, and the darkness has come upon our lives—in times of depression, and disappointment, and discouragement: times of loss, and loneliness, and defeat—when all the lights of life seem to have gone out, and all its joy seems quenched—it is then that God draws nearest to us, and reveals Himself most intimately to us, and pours out upon us all the riches of His grace. It is only when the darkness comes that God gets a chance with many of us, and that He is able to bless our souls.

¶ Material ease—the absence of any great fear or great sorrow—or great joy—that is apt to blunt our sensibilities and to put the unseen world far from us. Dark days have, for most of us, been the everlasting doors by which the King of Glory has come in.[1]

'It is a good thing for me that I have been afflicted,' said one of the psalmists. He had read one of the deepest secrets of life. And all the saints have said it after him in every age. And one day we shall be saying it too, every one of us. When we come to understand the meaning of life better in the backward look, we shall thank Him for the shadows as well as for the sunlight; for we shall know then the grace which descended upon us, in the night of our sorrow, as the dew.

¶ One of our men of letters has described the career of one of his friends: 'He had to bear a series of devastating calamities. He had loved the warmth and nearness of his home circle more deeply than most men, and the whole of it was swept away; he had depended for both stimulus and occupation upon his artistic work, and the power was taken from him at the moment of his highest achievement. His loss of fortune is not to be reckoned among his calamities, because it was no calamity to him.

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[1] J. A. Hutton.

He ended by finding a richer treasure than that he had set out to obtain; and I remember that he said to me once, not long before the end, that whatever others might feel about their own lives, he could not for a moment doubt that his own had been an education of a deliberate and loving kind, and that the day when he realized that, when he saw that there was not a single incident in his life that had not a deep and an intentional value for him, was one of the happiest days of his whole existence.'[1]

He writes in characters too grand
For our short sight to understand;
We catch but broken strokes, and try
To fathom all the mystery
Of withered hopes, of death, of life,
The endless war, the useless strife,—
But there, with larger, clearer sight,
We shall see this—His way was right.[2]

3. *God comes to the Humble.*—The dew is always heaviest upon the lowest ground. You do not find much dew upon the tops of the mountains: you do not find much dew upon the cedars of Lebanon; but down in the lowest valleys it falls abundantly, and every blade of grass has its own drop of dew.

We can understand, then, why it is that in the Scriptures there is such stress laid upon the grace of humility. Humility comes from the Latin *humus*, and that is the 'ground.' It is the grace which is the lowliest of all. The Lord Jesus sets it first of all the Beatitudes: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'; and He exemplifies it for all time in Himself, in His own perfect life and character: 'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.' He stooped to the manger, and He stooped to the Cross—He who was the Son of God—'He humbled himself.' All the garments of the Christ are dripping with the dew.

'Thus saith the high and the lofty one, that inhabiteth eternity, and whose name is holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.'

To the humble God doth come;
In his heart He makes His home.

The first thing which God has to do with us, then, if He is to bless us, is to break our pride, and to clothe us in the grace of humility. And the place where He breaks our pride, and puts the robe of this grace around us, is at the foot of the Cross of Christ. That was why the Cross was erected there. 'He giveth grace unto the humble'; and there is nothing that so humbles a man as the sight of the crucified Son of God—crucified for sinners—crucified for him!

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[1] Hubert L. Simpson.

[2] John Oxenham.

THE BOOK OF JOEL

INTRODUCTION

I

Date and Author

Most of the prophetic books have an historical setting which it is comparatively easy to discover, and which provides the key to the interpretation of their contents. But the Book of Joel is one of the few exceptions. The events to which it refers are not recorded anywhere else. It furnishes only the vaguest clues to the period of its origin. We must be content to take it as it stands, and to make what we can of it without the aid of any light from the historical books of the Old Testament.

The absence of any clear indication of date is very evident. No king of Judah or Israel is named. The book mentions none of the great empires—Assyria, Babylon, Persia—which held sway in succession over Palestine. The nations referred to are nearly all among the smaller neighbours of Judah and Israel, like Tyre and Sidon and Edom, which were there all the time. There is a passing allusion to Egypt, but Egypt, too, was always in the background of Old Testament history. The one fresh national name is that of the Greeks, to whom the people of Tyre and Sidon were selling Jewish slaves, but it is hard to say when that traffic might have begun. The only special event in the book is not a political one at all, but an unusually severe plague of locusts, aggravated by drought. This might have happened at any time, and though such visitations were doubtless frequent, the historical books do not single out any one in particular that we can identify with Joel's.

When there is so little to go upon, it is not surprising that different scholars have placed the book at very different times, some putting it even earlier than Amos, and others later than Malachi. Such hints as there are seem to point to the period after the return from the Exile. The name Israel is used, not for the separate kingdom of the Ten Tribes, but for the whole chosen nation which is God's people and God's heritage. Israel has been scattered among the nations. On the other hand, the worship of the Temple is a regular feature of the time, for one of the results of the plague of locusts is that the meat offering and the drink offering have been cut off from the house of the Lord. The mention of the Greeks suggests on the whole a later rather than an earlier date, for it was after the Persian wars (early in the fifth century B.C.) that Greece became a rising power, and began to come into closer touch with Asia and the East. Grounds like these, however, are too slight to enable the ordinary reader to base any confident conclusion upon them. For practical purposes the date of the book is unimportant. Joel's message has little to do with one time rather than another, and can be read with sufficient clearness in its own light.

About the prophet himself there is equally little to be said. All that is certain, beyond his own name and that of his father, is that he lived in Jerusalem, where his whole interest was evidently centred. His concern for the Temple, with its worship and its priests, finds frequent expression. The names of Judah, Jerusalem, and Zion run through the whole of his book. Neither his patriotism nor his religion knows any other home.

II

Contents

1. The immediate occasion of the book is a great national calamity in the shape of a plague of locusts more terrible than anything of the kind that has happened within living memory or before it. The old men are asked: 'Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers?' And there will be nothing like it for generations to come. The story of it will be handed down to children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and will still excite their wonder.

The picture of the locusts is highly poetical. They are an invading army, darkening the sky with their countless myriads, swift in their march as horses and chariots, moving with a sound like the crackling of flames in stubble, climbing city walls, entering houses by the windows, devouring everything in their path, finding the land like a garden of Eden before them, and leaving it behind them like a desolate wilderness. Nothing is left of vine or fig-tree but the whitened stems from which the bark has been peeled away. One swarm follows after another to make the devastation complete. This is not an exaggerated description, for all travellers in the East who have witnessed the passage of a swarm of locusts testify to its literal truth. Joel's powerful imagery is not overdrawn.

Along with the locusts, or after them, there had been a severe drought—in itself a sufficiently serious calamity in an Eastern land. We have a vivid picture of the parched fields, the unsprouted grain, the withered crops and fruit trees, the dried-up streams, the distress of the starving and thirsty cattle.

In these visitations the prophet sees the hand of God. He does not indeed speak of them as a judgment for any particular sins. He does not denounce any special forms of wickedness. He does not demand repentance and reform with respect to any definite evils. But none the less he recognizes in the whole calamity what he calls a 'day of the Lord.' And what God has sent, God must be implored to remove. It is a time for priests and people to humble themselves before Him, and unite in entreating His mercy. 'Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto the Lord.' 'Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him?'

This call to prayer is very urgent, but also very hopeful. Joel is sure that man's extremity will be God's opportunity. 'Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people.' 'Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the Lord will do great things.' The swarming locusts will be driven away to the Dead Sea on the East and the Mediterranean on the West. The rains will come down; the land will be fertile and fruitful again; the grass will spring up and the fruit trees will flourish; there will be abundance of corn and wine and oil. 'Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God.' One suggestive verse sums up all these promises. 'I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten.'

2. The recovery of the land from the locusts and the drought, however, is only the prelude to a still more momentous future. These calamities had been recognized as a 'day of the Lord' while they lasted, but they only foreshadowed 'the great and the terrible day of the Lord' which was still to come. This final 'day of the Lord' had no terrors for Israel, but for all the nations that had been Israel's enemies and oppressors it would be a day of doom.

Against that day, Joel declares, Israel will be secured beforehand by a great religious awakening—an outburst of prophetic insight and enthusiasm among old and young, high and low. Beyond the hope of the restoration of the land from the ravages of natural calamity, this grander hope springs into view. 'And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit . . . before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come.' This promise has a rather lurid setting of eclipses of the sun and the moon, and other terrifying wonders of Nature, but these are no more than poetic imagery of a kind that became increasingly common as prophecy (in its later stages) tended to develop into 'apocalypse.' It is the central idea of the promise that is significant. In earlier times the Spirit of God had been known as a mysterious influence that took possession of a few individuals here and there, endowing them with special gifts, and in particular with insight into spiritual truth and power to proclaim it in God's name. Moses had once said: 'Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets!' but there had been no sign of his wish coming to pass. Now, however, Joel took up the wish, and foretold its fulfilment. The day would dawn when every Israelite, old and young, servant and master, man and woman, would share the prophet's vision. The highest gifts of religious insight and inspiration would no longer be confined to a few chosen souls, but would be enjoyed by all.

It is not necessary to dwell upon the details of the coming judgment of the heathen nations which is described in the last chapter. All the nations named have their crimes against Israel specified as the reason for their punishment. They are summoned to gather for battle in 'the valley of Jehoshaphat' where they are to be overthrown by the might of God. (Jehoshaphat means 'the Lord is Judge.' The application of this name to the Kidron valley at Jerusalem does not go back to Old Testament times.) The picture of their destruction is heightened by convulsions and other portents of Nature, which belong to the prophet's 'apocalyptic' imagery. In contrast to the fate of the nations is the happiness and security of Israel, restored from captivity, dwelling in a land miraculously bountiful, with Jerusalem cleansed and sanctified and perpetually safe in the presence and strength of God.

III

Teaching

The special teaching of Joel is to be gathered from both divisions of his book—that which deals with the locusts and the drought as well as that which looks further into the future.

In the former, without attempting to connect the calamity with any particular national sin, the prophet recognizes God's Providence behind it, accepts it humbly as from His hand, and looks to His mercy to remove it. The call to prayer springs from faith in the character of God—'gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.' In the exhortation: 'Rend your heart, and not your garments,' there is a note of true spiritual religion. Outward demonstrations of humiliation and distress are valuable only as the expression of genuine feelings of penitence within.

In the latter division it must be admitted that the picture of the everlasting glory and prosperity of Judah and Jerusalem, and of the confusion of all their enemies represents a rather narrow and nationalistic hope. The prospect of the absence of strangers is welcomed. There is nothing of the missionary spirit which led other prophets to depict Jerusalem as the centre to which the nations would gather to worship the true God, or from which the true religion would go forth to other lands and peoples. But what Joel proclaimed in his own limited way was the coming victory of God's kingdom in the world. In his assurance of that he was right, though we have nothing to learn from him about the kind of kingdom and the kind of victory in which Christians believe to-day.

But the chief interest of Joel's teaching is connected with his promise of the outpouring of the Spirit. But for the narrative in the second chapter of Acts he would be little more than a name to the average Bible reader. When the whole company of the first Christians at Jerusalem were one day suddenly swept off their feet by a strange enthusiasm, and were moved to such a demonstrativeness of speech and action that their behaviour was set down by some to intoxication, Peter had another explanation. 'This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, that I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh, etc." (the whole passage being quoted). The great distinction of Joel is that he is the prophet of Pentecost. This does not mean that Pentecost was in all points a literal fulfilment of his words, for it was not marked by eclipses or other signs in the heavens. And it does not mean that Pentecost was the only or the complete fulfilment of his words. The gift of the Spirit is the abiding possession of the Christian Church. The fruits of the Spirit are the real mark of every Christian life. The Spirit of Christ, bestowed on all His followers in every age, is an influence that can turn the imagination and the enthusiasm of youth into the noblest channels, and preserve them fresh through all the disillusionments of life into old age. It can take possession of the humblest lives and lift them up into true dignity. Because we are living in the days of which Joel said: 'I will pour my spirit upon all flesh,' no life need be without this Presence and this Power.

James Patrick

Fasting

Joel ii. 12, 13.—'Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful.'

The philosophy of fasting is that it expresses repentance, and it uncovers the life to God. It is the voluntary disuse of anything innocent in itself—it is the forsaking of the good for the best—with a view to spiritual culture. It does not apply to food alone, but to everything which a man may desire.

1. The more we watch the lives of men, the more we see that one of the reasons why men are not occupied with great thoughts and interests is the way in which their lives are overfilled with little things. It is not that you despise the highest hopes and interests of your immortal nature that you neglect them so; it is mainly that your passions crowd so thick about you that you are entirely occupied with them. It is no untrue picture of the lives of many of us if we imagine ourselves, that is, our wills, standing in the centre; and close about each central figure, about each man's self, a crowd of clamorous passions and eager lusts; while away outside of them there wait, in larger circle, the higher claimants of our time and powers—truth and charity and religion, with all their train. A man sometimes puts out his hand, parts and pushes aside this clamorous crowd, these physical appetites, these secular ambitions. He says to them, 'Stand back; and, at least for a few moments, let me hear what truth and charity and religion have to say to my soul.' Then up through the emptiness that he has made there pours the rich company of higher thoughts and interests, and they gather for a time around the soul which belongs to them, but from which they have been shut away.

Every now and then a conscience, among the men and women who live easy, thoughtless lives, is stirred, and someone looks up anxiously, and says, 'Is this wrong? Is it wicked to do this?' And when they get their answer, 'No, certainly not wicked,' then they go back, and give their whole lives up to doing their innocent little piece of uselessness again. The question is not whether that is wicked, whether God will punish you for doing that; the question is whether that thing is keeping other and better things away; whether behind its little bulk the vast privilege and dignity of duty is hid; whether it stands between God and your soul. To put aside everything that hinders the highest from coming to us, and then to call to us that highest who is always waiting to come—fasting and prayer—this, as the habit and tenor of a life, is noble. As an occasional effort even, if it is real and earnest, it makes the soul freer for the future.

What, then, is Lent? If our souls are sinful and are shut too close by many worldinesses against that Lord who is their Life and their Saviour, let us, at least for a few weeks, proclaim by soberness and quietude of life that we know our responsibility, and how often we have been false to it. By some small symbols let us bear witness that we know something of the solemnity of living, the dreadfulness of sin, the struggle of repentance. Our symbols may be very feeble; our sackcloth may be lined with silk and our ashes scented with the juice of roses; but let us do something that shall break the mere monotony of complacent living, which seems to be forever saying over to itself that there is no such thing as sin, that to live is light and easy work. Perhaps as we tell God of what little sorrow for our sins we have, our sorrow for our sins may be increased; and while we stand there in His presence the fasting may gather a truer reality of repentance behind it. And as we realize that our redemption is rooted in the Divine self-sacrifice we recoil from human self-indulgence. 'What a shame,' cried St Bernard, 'to be a delicate member of the Head crowned with thorns.'

Whoso the Holy Place would enter in
  Must pray and fast: must pray for steadfast grace
  To turn from all that hides the Father's face;
Must fast from every sweet that tends to sin.

2. Fasting is an expression of hungering after God, of grief that we know Him so little, though we might know Him so well. It is no mere obedience to the Church's rule; fasting is a seeking after God, without whom we cannot live. It is the abandonment for a time of lesser blessings, that we may strengthen the appeal which we make for the higher. Our fasting is to be the fasting of love; and the blessing that we seek by it is the fuller knowledge of God Himself. But after all it is but a help in the quest. First come the words, 'Turn ye unto me with all your heart.'

We are to turn to God as an actual living Person. It would not be enough to turn from our sins, even though apart from God we could turn from them. We must turn to God; we must speak with Him face to face, and be restored to right relations with Him. In our best moments we say 'I will arise,' but we do not add 'and go to my Father'; and so even the arising comes to little or nothing. 'Take with you words, and return unto the Lord,' says another prophet. Yes! we must take with us words—our own words are best. We must make a new effort to hold communion with God.

Though turning to God means more than turning from sin, it undoubtedly involves that, and it will fail unless the turning from sin is real. 'Turn ye unto me with all your heart.' The heart includes much more than the affections; it includes 'all that is within us'; but it is the will which is of primary importance. To turn to God with all our hearts is to turn to Him with the one desire of doing the whole of His will, and of doing nothing else. We must, as our Lord says, have the 'single eye,' which fills the whole body with light. What has been the main cause of our sins in the past? Not that we were obstinately set upon what was definitely evil. It was that we were what St James calls 'double-minded.' We desired to do right, if it did not cost us too much; but we were not willing to make the sacrifices of pleasure and interest which doing right demanded. Now to turn to God with all our hearts is to turn to Him with the deliberate intention of doing His will, whatever it may cost, whatever we may have to abandon for it. So let us offer our intentions to God during Lent, and regard them not primarily as a self-discipline, but as a spontaneous expression of love and sorrow which we could not abandon without necessity.

3. Are there any dangers in fasting that we ought to guard against? We have seen that the fast must be to the utmost possible extent the free action of the individual, having no external obligation, so that it may be really his own in the deep reality required to earn the blessing spoken of by our Lord. Again, a man must not allow into his motives any doubt of the all-embracing sufficiency of God's love and of Christ's sacrifice. There now remains no revengeful punishment for our sins, and anything that breathes this idea is an insult to our Father. And what shall we say of the man who not only fails to see the truth in this matter, but even imagines that, as in a business transaction, he can lessen the total of his penalty by immediate part payment? Similarly, no man must imagine that there is any virtue in the mere fact of undergoing pain, or that there is any pleasure to God in seeing us in its grip. No such faithless thoughts as these were present in St Paul's mind when he spoke of filling up that which was lacking in the sufferings of Christ. And we, on our part, must flee them as first steps in the great apostasy. On the other hand, a fast may be a legitimate expression of penitence, a means of helping ourselves to realize the heinousness of sin, and a reminder of what great and real mental distress would bring about as a natural result.

He is to be strongly condemned who by wilful and excessive fasting renders himself less fit for his daily duty, dislocating the smooth working of his body; and, setting his nerves on edge, makes it impossible for himself to remain cool under provocation or even decently civil to those round about him. How shall such a man use the prayer not to be led into temptation? Then, again, there are the dangers directly referred to by our Lord, and corresponding to each danger the right spirit through which God may send a blessing. If one who fasts were to esteem himself as necessarily more in earnest than another who does not; if he look upon his fast as a more pleasing offering than judgment, mercy, and truth; if in company where fasting was highly regarded he were to parade his own; then without any controversy that man may have his reward, but it is not from his heavenly Father. There is another side to that truth. Lent may at least remind modern Christians that Christ does call them to something higher and nobler than physical comfort. A distinguished continental scholar has declared that the most characteristic word of the English tongue and the English people to-day is the word 'comfort'—a word steeped and saturated with materialism. And surely that precept comes home to every man for whom 'the garden of Gethsemane is more sacred than the garden of Epicurus.' In his own daily experience a Christian proves that to hold fast the one thing needful involves the letting go of other things lovely and desirable, and that in thought as well as in action he must steadily narrow his way, forsaking the good for the Best.

¶ As Lacordaire wrote: 'It always seems to me that the retrenchment of useless expenditure, the laying aside of what one may call the relatively necessary, is the high-road to Christian disentanglement of heart.'

¶ Young people seem absorbed nowadays in getting their own way. Matthew Arnold says you can get so absorbed in heroism that *that* becomes your own way. But you can't have growth if you do what you like as we ordinarily mean it, until we come again to live for duty and not for rights, to be busy with contrition for sin and not with comforts. God is in duty. The notion of being comfortable! How vulgar it is! God never makes our lives comfortable. Even in heaven I believe there will be an equivalent of suffering—not as it stands here—but the equivalent, suffering beatified. I feel sure of this.[1]

The deeper we go into realities the wider is our idea of a profitable fast. When a man accepts any and all of his life's discipline from the hand of God, that is indeed a profitable fast. Readers of Mark Rutherford will recall the sermon which Mr Bradshaw preached in Pike Street Chapel on the text, 'Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: but in the place which the Lord hath chosen, there shalt thou offer thy burnt offerings, and there shalt thou do all that I command thee.' Transcending the ancient Hebrew ritual, that text sums up one of the piercing truths of the Bible, which can stab our consciences like a sword. For it warns us against the wilfulness which taints and spoils our very sacrifice of self. Christian sacrifice in spirit and in truth means surrender to the living will of the living God. We dare not pour out our hearts on altars by the wayside, chosen at our pleasure. God Himself appoints the place where our sacrifice must be offered up. To Abraham, His friend, He said, 'Take now thy son, thine only son whom thou lovest, and offer him upon one of the mountains that I will tell thee of.' As God Himself must be the supreme Object of spiritual surrender, so God Himself shows us that our sacrifice must be complete not only in motive but in detail. He who claims the offering also chooses the altar. And the joyful acceptance of His blessed Will becomes part of our surrender, without which we cannot be made perfect. General Gordon penetrated to the root of the whole matter when he said: 'I learned that to be like Christ, we must not only have our will subordinated to His, but we must be delighted to have it so.'

It is good to be last, not first,
  Pending the present distress;
It is good to hunger and thirst,
  So it be for righteousness.
It is good to spend and be spent,
  It is good to watch and to pray;
Life and Death make a goodly Lent,
  So it leads to Easter Day.

Blotting out the Past

Joel ii. 25.—'And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten.'

The Book of Joel is filled with references to a great and destructive plague of locusts. There are vivid phrases in the book which give to us impressionist pictures of the season of calamity, the sky darkened with the invading horde, the land absolutely wasted as though an army had passed through it. We get a picture of the utter destruction which these pests had left in their train, sweeping in clouds over the whole land, and making garden and field like a desert. It must have been a stupendous calamity. There is no doubt at all events that the situation was felt so acutely as to call for some interpreting light, and as if in answer to a people's cry of need there is given this Divine promise, 'I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten'—a promise which reveals the very heart and spirit of God.

1. How does God restore the years that the locust has eaten? What is our right attitude to the past—its failure and sin?

The modern man might say, truly enough, that our business in the world is to find out what we are good for, and that it is waste of time to fight our lost battles over again. He would probably add that in any case the past is over and done with; it is irrevocable, for better or worse; bury it then. That is the sage advice of Goethe:—

Wouldst fashion for thyself a seemly life?
Then fret not over what is past and gone,
But, whatsoe'er thou may'st have lost behind,
Live now as if thy life were just begun.

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[1] *Letters from Baron Friedrich von Hügel to a Niece*, xxii.

Be sure that thou no fellow mortal hate,
And all the rest leave to a Higher Power.

The modern man would be, as usual, half right. It is, as the proverb says, no use to cry over spilt milk. But he is half wrong, because repentance is not simply regret. St Paul has distinguished so clearly between the right and the wrong kind of sorrow for sin that there is no excuse for confounding them. 'I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge.' So godly sorrow looks mainly forward; the sorrow of the world looks back. The right sorrow stimulates, the wrong sorrow paralyses. The one turns honest shame into grim resolve, the other turns self-contempt into morose despondency.

Our Lord never dwells on sin except in connection with repentance and forgiveness. He who loves much will be forgiven many sins. But what do we mean when we say that our sins are forgiven? We say they are blotted out of God's book. No doubt that is only a metaphor, and a somewhat undignified one. We need not picture our Creator keeping a score against us. Forgiveness must mean something more than cancelling a debt or remitting a penalty. We do not want to stand towards God only in this formal and external relation. How does forgiveness affect our relation towards our own past? We must examine the old saying that even God cannot alter the past. No doubt, in a sense, what is done cannot be undone. The awful tragedy of the irreparable is constantly brought home to us. We are hurt by the sight of any beautiful thing hopelessly broken, because it symbolizes so much to us. The sight of death, especially premature death, distresses us. Never again, we say, through all the ages, will precisely this gracious form be seen alive again. All things are taken from us and become parcels and portions of the dreadful past. God's irreversible chastisements—what a grim shape they make in medicine and social science.

Yet this is not the whole truth. If it were, repentance and forgiveness would have no meaning at all. For they do not mean something purely external and arbitrary, something remitted but not restored, something imputed but not imparted. God does not say, 'Depart in peace; be ye warmed and filled,' without giving us what our hungry and thirsty souls desire. No; forgiveness is something real. It is not merely a legal fiction; it alters our past somehow; and how is this possible?

2. What is the nature of the past? Is it something dead and cold? Hardly so, for it still affects us. It pushes and pulls us, drives and thwarts us. We are not free from it, whatever it is. The past which concerns us consists exclusively of events which are not done with but which are still in the making. If there are any events in the past which are really rounded off and finished, so that no thread of them is being woven into the web which is now being spun, those events are not significant, which is much the same as non-existent. What once had meaning has meaning always, in a changing life which is not over yet. All events which have a meaning exist in the timeless present which we call eternity. We are citizens of eternity, and we must learn to think imperially. As immortal spirits, we are not in time; time is rather in us. In this timeless realm the past lives again, not as an album of instantaneous photographs, where motion appears grotesquely arrested, not as a painted masterpiece perilously retouched by imaginative artists, nor repainted by the audacity of historians who do not share the disability attributed to the Deity of not being able to alter the past; but it lives as part of an organic process, it is an integral factor in spiritual activity. The past is a fragment which awaits its completion; it is something which has not yet taken its final shape; it is still malleable, for its character has not yet been fully determined. It will be what we shall make it, for it is still in the making. And yet, happily, not quite that. That which gives a spiritual unity to the multiplicity and apparent chaos of earthly happenings, binding events together in an organic whole, repairing, readjusting, completing, picking up the dropped stitches of time and chance, joining up the

ragged edges into a compact fabric; this is God's work, not ours. It belongs to a larger scheme than our earthly life. Yet it is a human work, an individual work, for it is Christ's, since through Christ we are called to be fellow-workers of God.

It will help us to understand this better if we compare the well-known Indian doctrine of Karma with the Christian doctrine of grace. Karma means inexorable justice: the present is exactly what the past has made it. I am reaping what I have sown. There is no escape; I have made my bed, and I must lie on it. But the Christian doctrine of grace, of atonement and forgiveness, assures us that there is a way of escape. While in Buddhism the spiritual world is described entirely in terms of rest, of sleep, of death, in Christianity it is described entirely in terms of life and activity. What survives for us from the past is part of ourselves, but what that part shall be and mean is to be determined by the whole, by the end.

So long as the Divine grace is working in us nothing is ever quite done with. The past sins of a good man, says a mediæval English saint, will be seen in heaven, not as wounds, but as worship. That is what forgiveness does for us. It helps us to turn our stumbling-blocks into stepping-stones, because God has deigned to take our nature upon Him and infuse His Divine power into it. We can make His purposes ours. Even our wretched past may be made noble. God may still restore the years that the locusts have eaten.

¶ 'I do not regret the past,' cries the 'Lady of the Decoration,' at the close of her story, 'for through it the present *is*. All the loneliness, the heartaches, and the pains are justified now! I believe that, whilst I have been struggling out here in Japan, God has restored to me the years that the locust had eaten, and that I shall be permitted to return to a new life, a life given back by God!'

¶ R. J. Campbell says: 'When I was a very little fellow I remember that for a childish fault my pocket money was taken from me by someone who loved me. I thought it was gone for ever, and for me that meant merely what it represented in joy, for I had set my little heart on something I thought worth while. By and by the heart that robbed me of it gave it back again. It was not the money that came, it was its equivalent, and there was a usury too, and that usury was the lesson I had learned. There came back to me what I needed most, and rejoiced most over, and there came to me a knowledge of how it was done. This is the kind of partnership into which we are entering with God.'[1]

The process is not likely to be agreeable to ourselves; it may be painful enough; but what a blessed thing that it should be possible at all! We are not promised that no personal loss will remain; that is too much to expect; but many men have risen high enough to acqiesce in losses which they feel they have deserved. They are fellow-workers with God, who has many fellow-workers, many instruments. His will will be done, by us or by others. What matters? It is enough for us, enough to know that our wretched blunders will not remain as blots, scars, and flaws in God's temple.

Afterwards

Joel ii. 28, 29.—'It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.'

We do not know when Joel prophesied, nor does it greatly matter. Apart from the title of his book, he is a mere name. But his message is of perennial significance.

The words of the text are familiar to us, as they are quoted in the famous sermon of St Peter, which interprets the wonders of the Day of Pentecost. This fact has done much to rob them of the meaning which belongs to them in their original context, and which undoubtedly attached to them in the mind of the Apostle. When we turn back to the Old Testament and read familiar words as they originally stood, we insensibly invest their phrases with the dogmatic associations of Christian theology. But the method which we ought to pursue is precisely the reverse of this. We must read the passage in its original setting and try to understand what Joel meant when he proclaimed the effusion of God's spirit upon all flesh; then pass onward to the Acts of the Apostles, and we will perceive, with a fullness hitherto unrealized, what Peter meant when he cried, 'This is that which hath been spoken by the prophet.'

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[1] *The Song of Ages*, 72.

1. Now there is a significant adverb in the passage, as it was originally spoken, which at once puts this noble utterance in relation to the whole subject of Joel's book. This is the word 'afterward.' 'It shall come to pass afterward,' says the prophet. The gift of the spirit comes as a climax of Divine action. It has its definite and appropriate place in the accomplishment of the Divine purpose. The book opens with a striking and vivid account of what, without any apology, we may call a visitation of God. There are certain kinds of events in the story of men and nations to which the conscience of the race has almost instinctively accorded this designation. Such, for instance, is an earthquake, which causes an appalling sense of human powerlessness amid a falling world. Such, too, without any doubt, is that terror of the East, an invasion of locusts. This is the scourge which Joel has described with an accuracy that astonishes all who have ever experienced its ravages. A traveller in Syria has described his sensations as he approached a hill-side, the surface of which seemed literally moving down towards him. So violently did his horse tremble that he was forced to dismount, and stood gazing with wonder at what looked like a stream of molten mortar. In reality it was myriads of young locusts on their resistless march. When the very dust of the earth seems to quicken and to move, day after day, voracious and marauding, over cornland and pasture, no device of man can stay the disaster that must inevitably ensue. Fire will not keep them at bay. Walls will not delay their progress. They march like Fate. They are inexorable as Death. 'They leap upon the city. They run upon the wall. They climb up into the houses. They enter in at the windows like a thief.'

When Joel speaks of the terror and dismay caused by such a visitation, he is using language confirmed by all who have ever witnessed it. It is as though the land lay under an interdict, as though the Day of Judgment were come. We can have but a faint idea of the abject misery, the crushing grief with which the farmers of Israel looked upon the overwhelming picture of a teeming countryside turned in a few short days into a barren waste, and thought upon the years which the locust had eaten. No squadrons of hostile cavalry, scouring the land with fire and sword, ever wrought such havoc as these millions of tiny horsemen, whose noise is like the flame that crackles in the stubble. And if, as may well be the case, drought supervenes upon the devastation of this devouring swarm, there is nothing on which the eye may rest but whitened stumps and withered fields, empty barns and dry vats, cattle that are living skeletons and gaunt sheep huddled in the folds.

Joel points the contrast between the hopes of spring and the horrors of harvest in language that expresses no more than the naked truth. 'The land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness.' It is a prophet, calling to the sons of men from whom all joy is withered, that cries out of a sympathetic grief, 'Rend your hearts and not your garments.'

But the hot wind drops at last, and the soft showers fall. Praise God for His gracious rain! In the stirring of the earth with the first signs of returning life, the prophet hears the Lord Himself speaking to His land. It is the spiritual interpretation of the call of the spring. But what a spring this was, following the bitter ruin of the husbandman's hope, the sorrow of the shepherd for his dying flocks! If ever the voices of Nature as it renews the face of the earth had a message for wintry souls, surely the fields were singing now. The blades pushing their eager way through the yielding soil, the buds breaking white upon the black branches, the mavis learning once again its hymn of praise, the braes bleating once more with the lambs' happy plaintiveness. The earth communicates her joy to the beasts of the field. The children of Zion translate into the articulate anthems of human speech the unconscious song of a resurgent life:—

Fear not, O land, be glad and rejoice!
  For the pastures of the wilderness do spring,
  For the tree beareth her fruit.

But what is this force more irresistible than the locusts' might? It is the universal life of God, the spirit of the Lord that fills the world. This is abundantly clear from the use of the word 'afterward.' 'Afterward'—that is the promise—'I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh.' But it is the spirit that God has been outpouring all through this wonderful work of replenishing the earth. The very ground, which drinks in the rain, is capable of that one and the self-same Spirit, which 'entering into holy souls maketh them sons of God and prophets.'

The unity of all that is, which lives and moves and has its being in God, is a principle deep-seated in the sacred Scriptures. It meets us alike on the first page and on the last. It is the Spirit, the living reality of God, which broods upon the face of the waters, forms the dry ground, clothes it with verdure, peoples it with moving life, creates man in the image of God's own eternity, and draws him into blissful communion with Himself. And on the throne of God and of the Lamb is seated He who is the first and the last, whose Kingdom is a new heaven and a new earth, and whose servants shall serve Him and see His face. The mind which separates the sacred and the secular, and which contrasts the laws of matter with the freedom of the spirit, is not the mind of Him who said: 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' The Christian believes that the Divine Spirit operates as certainly in the falling of the rain, in the succession of the seasons, in the courses of the stars, as in the prayer of the contrite, the meditation of the saint, the redemption of mankind. The wings of the morning shall not bear me from the Spirit, nor the darkness hide me from His presence. And it is but the last and highest expression of the truth, which the Bible reveals, to call upon Him as a Person, and to acknowledge Him as God.

One voice speaks from all things
And one word is all it speaks,
Alike the tempest's gloom, the sunshine's heaven
And the heart of man,
The tiniest worm which in low highness creeps,
On rock-ribbed mountains from whose heavenly peaks
The vision far and wide sweeps on the eye.

The word is God, whose meaning no one knows,
Nor ever has known, can know, all in all,
The one eternal lesson of the universe,
Which holds the shining of one face alone,
The beating of one heart, the voice of voices,
The music of the soul.[1]

2. But the word 'afterward' has yet something more to tell us. It implies a true sequence in these successive activities of the Life of God. The Christian apostle, in his famous argument for the resurrection of the body, declares a great principle of Divine action. 'First that which is natural, afterward that which is spiritual.' By 'spiritual' he, of course, means those aspects of existence to which in popular classification we are accustomed to apply this designation. And it is the same principle which governs the prophetic promise in the passage which we are now considering. 'It shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh.'

It is a not infrequent charge against the clergy of the modern age that they are exchanging a spiritual for a material gospel, and proclaiming a social rather than a Divine Christ. Now it is the duty of the Christian minister to preach the forgiveness of sins and not the reconstruction of society. Eternal salvation, not economic revolution, is now, as it ever has been, the hope of a sinful race. Nothing short of an outpouring of the Spirit in its fullest Pentecostal form is the promise which alone can satisfy the needs and longings of mankind. But notice that the outpouring of which Joel here speaks is to be 'upon all flesh,' that is, all classes of society, the whole nation. God, who has renewed the life of the land, is about to renew also the life of all the people. And this outlook should be that of every minister of the Church to-day. The religious revival for which we look will be democratic in its sweep. When we think of the young men, it is not mainly the gilded youth of Belgravia, but the lads in offices and shops, the men who live in city warehouses, the apprentices in our foundries—it is they who are to see visions. And it is the old men, who have filled unnoticed posts, and earned their modest pensions, who are to be the dreamers of dreams. The servants include, no doubt, all those who serve their day and generation, but not least the grimy sons of toil, who daily risk their lives in forgotten mines, or stand upon the footplate to earn small wages and bear great responsibilities.

Now there are certain grave facts which come into view as soon as we perceive that God's purpose is not to raise up prophets here and there but to provide Himself with a witnessing nation. 'To the poor the gospel is preached,' said the Lord. He was not thinking of the wretched, the submerged, the miserable, who are living from day to day on that precarious margin of subsistence which almost precludes even the power to think. He was not mocking those who claimed the right to live here, by holding out to them as a substitute the hope of a blessed hereafter. No, indeed. In the passage before us Joel points to the restored prosperity of the people as a pledge of the outpoured Spirit. And again and again has history witnessed to the fact that, we would not say an age of luxury, but times of national prosperity are the great opportunity of spiritual religion. Our Lord Himself found His first disciples amid the prosperity and opulence of Galilee. They achieved their ministry in poverty and persecution, but they brought to that ministry the force of minds and bodies trained in a fertile land and by a prosperous commerce. The Reformation was preceded by the Renaissance, and in Europe drew its forces, not from the impoverished populations of Italy and Southern Austria, but from the large civic and commercial Germany. Even Wesley's great revival of religion among the labouring classes of England took place at a time when prices were far lower than in the previous century, and wages had slightly risen. The witness of history is uniform. God's Spirit finds fullest scope in communities of a certain degree of civilization and of freedom from sordidness. Men must have time to reflect, time to feel the soul's deeper needs, time to listen to the silent voices, before the nobler things of life make their imperious appeal. The spiritual is built up upon the natural. When the social plagues of rich men's selfishness and the poverty of the very poor are lifted from us, then we may look for the fulfilment of Joel's prediction—even upon all the slaves and upon the handmaidens will I pour My Spirit.

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[1] E. H. Griggs.

¶ Mencius, the Chinese sage, wrote: 'If the people have not a certain livelihood, they will not have a fixed heart. And if they have not a fixed heart, there is nothing which they will not do in the way of self-abandonment. An intelligent ruler will regulate the livelihood of the people, so as to make sure that, above, they have sufficient wherewith to serve their parents, and, below, sufficient wherewith to support their wives and children; that in good years they shall always be abundantly satisfied, and that in bad years they shall escape the danger of perishing. After this he may urge them, and they will proceed to what is good.'

The Power of the Ideal

Joel ii. 28.—'Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.'

The latter part of Joel's prophecy has a new note of encouragement and hope. If Israel turns to God with fasting and with weeping and with mourning, the Lord will have mercy upon them. The earth will again bring forth her fruits, and the people will enjoy material prosperity once more. This, in turn, will form a stable basis for a revival of truly religious life. Jehovah will pour out His spirit, the Divine life-energy of knowledge and revelation and power, upon all flesh, all classes of society; and God's people will all be prophets, dreaming dreams and seeing visions.

1. It is strange, as we read these old writings from the dim past of Israel's history, to think how essentially modern they are in content, how fully they meet the needs and voice the aspirations of the world to-day. We too have fallen away from the worship of the true and living God, and bowed down before the idols of the market-place. The selfish pursuit of wealth and pleasure, materialism and self-seeking, characterize every phase of modern life. Unless we can recover a sense of true values, unless we regain the gift of idealism, there is no hope for modern civilization. 'Where there is no vision,' says an Old Testament writer, 'the people perish,' or, as the Revised Version reads, 'the people cast off restraint.' 'Casting off restraint' is the great evil and peril of to-day. The vision of the prophet is needed as well as the instruction of the law: morality requires the safeguard of religion. 'Wilt thou not revive us again, O Lord, that thy people may rejoice in thee?'

It is important, then, to consider the nature of our ideals—these visions which transform our life. An ideal is essentially remote and lofty and difficult of attainment, and yet it is the standard by which we judge and test the men we meet, and the interests which affect us. The more spiritual a man is the higher are his ideals. Like the horizon, they advance as we do, lying always just ahead of each camping-ground upon our march through life. The star seems to 'go before us,' even if it is we ourselves who really progress.

¶ That gifted young missionary, Temple Gairdner, writes after his first year's work in Cairo: 'For me the die has been cast: the only way to peace and that self-realization which is indeed Salvation is, for me, the way of spirituality. God has shown me this and has closed every other path. Only sometimes, in the weakness of the spirit, the heart looks wistfully back at some of those closed avenues which one sees other men treading, and whispers, "You have aimed too high, and may miss all; aim lower, and you will at least attain something." It cannot be, it cannot be. "Onward to the starry track, glimmering up the heights beyond me, on and ever on."'[1]

That low man seeks a little thing to do,
  Sees it and does it.
This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
  Dies ere he knows it.

And so the fool laughs at the visions he cannot understand, crying with the bitter mockery of Joseph's brothers, 'Behold, this dreamer cometh!' He forgets the wise words of Robert Louis Stevenson, that 'it is better to travel hopefully than to arrive': forgets, too, that the ideal of one age is the assured fact of its successor. We greatly err when we speak of dreams as the vaguest things we know. People think they have settled the whole matter of, say, the League of Nations, when they have said that it is an ideal. 'A very good thing, but an ideal; believers in it are very good men, but they are idealists.' But the world owes most of what is good to men who have dreamed and then set themselves to the task of realizing their dreams.

We are the music-makers, and we are the
  dreamers of dreams,
Yet we are the movers and shakers of the world
  for ever, it seems.

We know by experience that this power of dreaming is the unfailing mark of all active and keen life. Man's supreme glory as man consists in this: that he can throw out his pioneering imagination into to-morrow, and can live in his visions. Perhaps, indeed, it is this gift of his soul that separates him finally from the beasts of the field, and links him with God. We are fit for God just because we can dream.

2. We dream our dreams and see our visions, but how can we make them come true? The only answer is, to get beyond ourselves. Selfishness is the greatest enemy of idealism. We see the different views of human life in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The first is the view illustrated by the thieves who stripped the unhappy traveller and left him naked and bleeding by the road. Its jungle-philosophy is briefly this: 'What is mine is mine, and what is yours is mine, if I can get it.' An outworn creed, you say? but it still has a great hold upon our world, a world which seems a struggle for the survival of the fittest. And the second view is that of the Priest and the Levite, who passed by on the other side: the legal view: 'What is mine is mine, and what is yours is yours, if you can keep it.' The Jews of Jesus' day had outgrown the robber-theory of life, but they had not yet escaped from the purely legal. And so He taught them the great Christian ideal, the Good Samaritan's view of life: 'What is yours is yours, and what is mine is yours, if you need it.' Sacrifice and service—these are the keynotes to His teaching.

And also to His example. When our Lord took our flesh upon Him He emptied Himself of every power He might have used, every art or artifice that might have helped His cause, and He trusted simply to a dream. What was His dream? In the first place, He declared that this world of ours, this sinning, foolish world, may be saved and redeemed. He dreamt that: and it was His only weapon in winning His Kingdom. That is why He lived: that is why He died. It is fashionable nowadays just to call it a dream and be done with it. Well may we call it only an impracticable dream, as we think of the murder, the drunkenness and the lust, the war and the passions of the nations, the degrading temptations that stand unreproved. A redeemed world! What a foolish dream for the twentieth century, and yet that dream must sit uncrushable in the heart of Christ's true Church. It is what every idealist is dreaming nowadays. He thinks, for instance, that new social measures will do it, Acts of Parliament, and social reconstructions. These are all good dreams so far as they go, but we know that in Jesus it is only as the world's heart is redeemed from sin and vice, that the new world will ever come.

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[1] C. E. Padwick, *Temple Gairdner of Cairo*, 85.

¶ Says the Bishop of Whitby: 'Schemes for the improvement and welfare of mankind must have good men to carry them through, and we must have those who are to benefit by the schemes made good men, otherwise they will be of no avail so far as the betterment of the world is concerned. What is really wanted at present, and at all times, is Christ. If we accept Him, and become part of His body, then He will work in and through us. I know what I am talking about, as I have worked in the slums of London for thirty years.'

Our Lord dreamed also another dream—that our frail lives, with their petty tragic passions and their stains and their unholy follies, may be made perfect, may be made like God's! That is what He dreamed; and if we can only arm ourselves with this dream we shall be irresistible.

¶ I remember a man once saying to me: 'I do not understand all this talk about Christian perfection and following on to know the Lord more perfectly and seeking to be conformed to His image and likeness. I am perfectly satisfied to know that my sins are forgiven, to know that I am in Christ, and that there is no condemnation to them which are in Him, to know that when my course is over I am going safely to heaven.'

I said to him: 'That is all right, my brother, but do you think God is satisfied with that? Do you think that is what Jesus Christ died for?' The man did not answer, he just turned on his heel and left me.[1]

Is not this the Vision of visions, the Vision in which all other visions are enfolded? We shall find God; the imperfect shall come to perfection; the child shall come to the Father's house. In many forms, in many colours, that is the vision which keeps the world's fainting heart alive, and makes the earth, through all its years of sorrow, rich with an under-treasure of perpetual joy.

When Jesus is going to wash His disciples' feet at the Last Supper, it is said that He does this action knowing that 'He came from God and went to God.' What words are these! 'He came from God and went to God'—are not the dream and the vision there, the God behind Him and the God before?

Here is the strength of this great prophecy; the thing it prophesies is already on the earth. It shines supremely in Jesus. It shines in many an exalted soul.

Time and tides go by,
Nations fade and die,
But God's majestic truth
Leads on its eager youth
For ever and for aye.

Dreams and Visions

Joel ii. 28.—'Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.'

Youth is the period of visions. In the clear light of life's early days we see with piercing distinctness, because the faculty of the vision is fresh in us. What gives youth its power is that there is a noble inconsiderateness in its temper, which brings vision and action into closer relation than usually happens in later life. For youth, to see is to act, to believe is to affirm, to know is to do. The one key to a noble life is to see clearly, and then to act in absolute obedience to the highest vision. The visions of youth then become the dreams of age.

The measure of a man is the measure of his vision. Man is pre-eminently the creature who sees. Other creatures can look in stolid silence on the stars, but no other can watch them with intelligent curiosity and read their secret. What are the chief visions by which men live? They are four—the vision of the Mind, which is the vision of Progress; of the Moral Nature, which is the vision of Duty; of the Heart, which is the vision of Love; of the Soul, which is the vision of Faith. It is by these visions that men live. To keep these visions through youth and manhood is to live nobly, and for such as do this the visions of youth become the dreams of age, and life rounds itself off into noble music and Divine completion.

1. *The Vision of the Mind*, which is the vision of Progress. It is plain that Joel, in writing these words, felt himself at the end of an era.

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[1] J. Stuart Holden.

He sums up the evils of his time; he discounts its glory; he foresees its retributions; and he says there is nigh at hand 'a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, as the dawn spread upon the mountains.' We are familiar with this prophecy. The merest glance at history convinces us that time moves in cycles. There is a period of growth, followed by a time of splendour, and then by a rapid decline.

Have we come to-day to such a period of decline? We have had our dreams and our visions, and now the visions are clouded, the dreams are bitter. Age and youth alike are disillusioned and cynical. In many instances the great experiments from which so much was hoped have seemed to fail. We still have poverty and drunkenness and social misery. Over all our minds there is the paralysis of hesitation and fear.

How are we to be redeemed from it? By the one supreme thought that the spirit of God still moves among the nations. 'I will pour out my spirit on all flesh' is a promise not for one age alone, but for every age till the Divine Will is perfectly wrought in the making of man. Things happen from time to time that seem a retardation of progress; humanity, afraid of itself and its destinies, retreats when every lofty voice calls to it to advance; civilization itself seems often to move in a circle, repeating old follies in new forms; but nevertheless the Eternal Spirit of Life and Progress works tireless through all.

2. *The Vision of Duty.* Is there one of us who has not felt promptings which we know are noble, and which lead to nobility of conduct? And the highest wisdom of life is to live by those visions. A life spent in the pursuit not of pleasures but of duties is evermore its own exceeding great reward. And not least among its rewards is this, that it leads to tranquil and satisfied old age. Men have regretted many things when they have come to the end of life; but no man ever yet regretted a duty bravely done.

It is in the days of youth that the vision of Duty is most clearly seen. It is then that the verdict of the moral nature is felt to be most authoritative. And is it not true also that youth is fruitful with moral dilemmas which can be solved only by strict obedience to the moral vision? How easy to prefer pleasure to duty! But woe to you if you yield, for it is death! Fight on in stubborn obedience to right, even when right seems the means by which a wrong is wrought on you, and you will overcome. Follow the vision of Duty, for be assured it is Divine, and—

He that ever following her commands,
On, with toil of heart and knees and hands,
Thro' the long gorge to the far light has won
His path upward and prevailed,
Shall find the toppling crags of duty scaled
Are close upon the shining table-lands
To which our God Himself is moon and sun.

3. Take, again, *the Vision of the Heart*, the dream of the reality of pure and noble love in the world. Cherish the dream, for there is none that fades so easily. It is one of the commonest temptations of youth to discount this vision with a cheap and shallow cynicism. But there are old men who have gone to the grave dreaming of this love. It has kept its radiance to the last, and its fine gold has not become dim, nor its freshness faded. But these men were the men who in youth saw the vision, and followed it; and that was why in age they dreamed dreams still, and saw a Paradise—

Where love once leal has never ceased,
  And dear eyes never lose their shine;
And there shall be a marriage feast
  Where Christ shall once more make the wine.

4. Highest of all is the fourth vision, *the Vision of the Soul*, which is the vision of Faith. Faith in what? Faith in God, in Christ, in the spiritual world which lies around this little life. In the early dawn of life, when the vision of the soul is fresh, we see these invisible refuges of the soul as great realities. To the keen and unsophisticated sense of the child, God, and Christ, and the spiritual world are real and near. We hear, as Wordsworth heard, the murmur of the sea that brought us hither; we cry as Browning cried to that 'Pale Form,' so dimly seen, deep-eyed, the Christ, who moves our souls and calls for our obedient love. And there are many moments of acute vision, which by God's great mercy happen to us, when we gain heart-moving glimpses of Christ, when He

steps out of some often-read verse before us in the Divine charm of His love; when some hymn interprets and reveals Him for an instant, and our souls go out to Him. And there are hours in life, too, when the reality of a spiritual world is made almost visible to us; when at the grave we have exchanged beauty for ashes, when in prayer we have seemed to find an answering voice, when in silence we have felt the mystery of unseen presences, and our hearts have leapt up in the passion of conscious immortality. Oh, cherish these visions, follow those inherent intuitions of the soul. Faint as they are, they are true; and they will grow stronger as we follow them, and in the struggle of life they will be the master-light of all our seeing, and in the eventide of life will shine like a benignant sunset on the path that slopes to rest.

¶ If ever man was true to his spiritual visions it was Blake. Through a life of poverty and much contempt those visions were his joy, and again we see the visions of youth making the dreams of age, for as he died he said, 'He was going to that country he had all his life wished to see, and expressed himself happy, hoping for salvation through Jesus Christ. Just before he died his countenance became fair, his eyes brightened, and he burst out singing of the things he saw in heaven.'[1]

The Valley of Decision

Joel iii. 14.—'Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.'

This is a striking picture which the prophet draws. He sees the nations of the world gathering in the valley of decision, mustering their forces for the great, final battle against God. They have long been oppressing Israel, but now the tide has turned. God Himself is about to fight for His people. It is the Day of the Lord, that day of judgment and decision, so often mentioned in the prophets, the day when God's cause will be vindicated and the supremacy of righteousness established. The oppressors of Israel will be destroyed. Once again the land will grow fertile when the invaders have been expelled. The vine will clothe the mountain-side, the dried-up brooks will be musical with running water. God will be a refuge for His people, and will make His dwelling-place in Zion.

1. Let us take the prophet's picture and apply it to ourselves. Every day we are in the valley of decision; we are part of that great multitude which God saw in the valley. Every day we make choices, and choices go to form character. We are perpetually being called on to decide between alternatives. Let us then think about decision as an all-important factor in human life.

Is there any need to prove that we possess the power of choice, that God has given us a measure of freedom, and that we can select between good and evil? The final argument for the reality of human freedom is that we know that we are free. It may be difficult to refute logically the arguments of the determinist, but, when we do wrong, we can never really satisfy our conscience by pleading that circumstances, or training, or inherited disposition were the cause of our sinning. There is something within us which tells us that we need not have done what we did, that of our own free will we chose the worse course. Our remorse is due just to this fact that we are aware that we possess this power of decision, and chose wrongly. Morality becomes meaningless if its imperious 'I ought' is not matched by an 'I can' and 'I will.'

¶ Henry Ward Beecher's father, old Dr Lyman Beecher, was quite as remarkable as his distinguished son and his distinguished daughter, Harriet Beecher Stowe. One day Dr Lyman Beecher had an exchange with a Methodist brother. Dr Beecher believed in fore-ordination. The two men met on a hill-side, each going to his place of worship, according to the way that was common in those days, riding his own horse. 'Now,' said Dr Beecher, 'you see my doctrine is right, you see that it was fore-ordained from the foundation of the world that we should make this exchange, and we have met here on the crest of this hill, you going to my church and I going to your church.' 'Very well,' said the Methodist preacher, 'if it was fore-ordained from the foundation of the world that we were to make this exchange, I will break the fore-ordination,' and he deliberately turned round and went back to his own church. Now that seems to be only toying with a profound and very perplexing principle, but underneath we come to this very simple fact, that every man must be loyal to his own conscience, and when we are discussing the fact as to whether we have the power to choose or not we get back to this, 'I know I could have done differently.'

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[1] W. J. Dawson.

It is true, however, that this power of free choice, which belongs to us all, is not equally developed in every one. It is, in fact, something which is not so much a ready-made and realized possession as a capacity which we have to expand by exercise and training. We have to struggle to win our true freedom. Take the case of the young child. It clearly has some freedom. It is not a machine, but its life is largely governed by impulse, and it is very impressionable and easily ruled by the suggestions of others. It is also extraordinarily imitative, and copies its elders. We cannot feel that its freedom is anything very formed or mature. Its will-power is in the making; there are as yet no settled choices in its life. Or take the case of the child born and bred in a city slum, coming of a criminal stock, and surrounded by an atmosphere of vice and squalor. The scales are heavily weighted against that child. The power of choosing the good is there, but the inducements to evil are so strong that we feel that the child is handicapped from the start in the race of life. In this matter of freedom, then, we do not all enter upon existence at the same level, and in none of us is the will fully formed at the beginning. Hence, only God who sees all and knows all, all the struggles and temptations, all the handicaps due to heredity and circumstances—only God can pass a completely fair judgment on a human character.

2. This thought of freedom as something which we have to struggle to win, and of the will as in the making, is of special importance to-day, when psychology is making such advances, and when we hear so much about the power of suggestion. M. Coué's Law of Reversed Effort has attracted much attention. He has stated that in the case of a conflict between the imagination and the will, the former always conquers. A drunkard, for example, resolves to make a strenuous effort to snap the chain which binds him. He summons up all his will-power and says, 'I will never touch drink again.' We are told that he is certain to fall, that he is doing the very thing which will lead to disaster. Before the imagination with its alluring picture of the bottle the will is bound to prove powerless. What the drunkard should have done was to make no effort to use his will, but to suggest to his imagination that he would conquer. Hence we find in books dealing with treatment by suggestion the advice that the patient should be as passive as possible and allow the suggestion to work unconsciously in his mind.

Now is it true that the imagination always conquers the will? Everything depends on what we mean by will. The imagination does not conquer the fully-formed will. That is supreme, and rules a man's life. But the unformed will, which should properly be called wish rather than will, is no doubt often too weak to have the mastery. The will, we must remember, is not a special faculty superadded to the other parts of a man's nature. It is the whole man acting, the personality expressing itself with purpose and conscious self-determination. The drunkard in the illustration just given was not a whole. He made his tremendous effort just because he was afraid of failure. Before his imagination, no doubt, would come later the alluring vision of the bottle; but another vision was present at the time when he made his decision, the vision of himself miserably failing again as he had so often failed in the past, and this paralysed his will. Suggestion is enormously valuable for us all in our moral struggles, because it helps to implant in us new imaginations, pictures of good instead of pictures of evil. It creates an atmosphere, in which the allurements of evil lose their power, and the will to good has a chance to develop.

Much psychological teaching to-day places the emphasis on the power of inherited tendencies and impulses, on the part played by the subconscious, and tends to make man the plaything of forces over which he has no real control. But the will is the citadel of personality; and, if there is any moral purpose at all in the universe, that purpose is to be found in the training of ourselves to make open-eyed decisions in life. to form noble characters, to be whole instead of a patchwork of fragments. To decide, and to decide strongly in that to which God calls us all.

3. How solemn is this thought of the valley of decision! Each of us is responsible to God

for the choices which he makes. None can avoid the responsibility. And all our life long we are in the valley, choosing daily, hourly. And imperceptibly, but surely, the choices add themselves together and form the settled habit and temper. Every day on the loom of our life the pattern of character is being woven. We must not allow circumstances to mould us nor take our tone from the society round us, As we call our will into play and learn to decide, our manhood will have a chance to develop as God means it to develop. So much is at stake. Everything which is really worth having is at stake—manhood, character, truth, eternity. The call comes to us to-day to range ourselves on the side of the eternal things, to be men and women of decision.

Heard are the voices,
Heard are the sage's,
The world's, and the age's.
Choose well: your choice is
Brief and yet endless.[1]

But someone may say, 'You tell us to decide, and to strengthen our wills; but how can I fight, alone and unaided, all my temptations?' We have not to fight alone. Let us remember the secret of the prophet's confidence. He knew which way the fight in the valley was going, because he knew that God was on the side of His people. His strength was their strength. All the resources of His power were at their disposal. Has God changed? Does He leave us to-day to fight unaided? Why, the very heart of the message of Christianity is that Christ can give us power. Christianity is a religion of life and power. And so, as we seek to train our wills, let us not forget that the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of the Living Christ, is waiting to reinforce any efforts we may make. Think what suggestion does. You open your minds to receive new influences. New thoughts, new ideals are suggested to you; and gradually, as you yield yourself to them, you are transformed.

If human agency can do that, are we going to say that the creative, life-giving Spirit of God cannot do infinitely more? Let him, then, who would strengthen his will, who would pass through the valley of decision master of himself and of the fight, seek the aid of the Spirit of God.

O come and dwell in me,
Spirit of power within!
And bring the glorious liberty
From sorrow, fear, and sin.

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[1] Goethe, translated by Carlyle.

THE BOOK OF AMOS

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Amos belongs to the second of the three divisions—the Law, the Prophets, the Writings—into which the Jewish Bible falls. The title 'Former Prophets' was applied to the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings; the title 'Latter Prophets' to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and 'the Twelve,' this last designation standing for the so-called Minor Prophets (minor in respect of the size of the books, not the importance of their authors). In the Hebrew Bible Amos stands third in this group, being preceded by Hosea and Joel; and the same arrangement is followed in the English Bible. But it is generally agreed that he ought to come first, being a little earlier than Hosea, and probably three centuries earlier than Joel. Amos is thus the earliest of the so-called *writing* prophets. His predecessors, men like Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha never, so far as we know, employed the pen to perpetuate the memory and to heighten the effect of their utterances; but from the time of Amos onwards the prophet is not only a speaker but an author. It is practically certain that Amos reduced to writing the discourses that make up the book which bears his name, and upon the whole it seems probable that it was his hand also that arranged their order.

I

The Author

'Āmôs (to be distinguished from 'Āmôṣ, the father of Isaiah) belonged to the Southern kingdom, the kingdom of Judah, although his prophetic ministry was discharged in the kingdom of the North. In the title of the book, and again in vii. 14, he is described as a "herdman" (Heb. *nôqēd*, *i.e.* one who owned or tended a breed of sheep still known to the Arabs as *naqad*, diminutive in size, but greatly prized for their wool). In the second of these passages he tells us also that he cultivated sycomore trees. (These yielded an inferior kind of fig, which formed a common article of food among the poor.) The home of Amos was at Tekoa, or in its neighbourhood, and his occupation would involve much moving about in the 'Wilderness of Tekoa,' that desolate region which in New Testament times was the early home of John the Baptist, and also the scene of our Lord's temptation. Tekoa itself is twelve miles south of Jerusalem, and six miles south of Bethlehem, and is situated at a height of 2800 feet above the level of the Mediterranean. It is shut in by hills on all sides except the east, where, for nearly eighteen miles, there is a rugged descent of 4000 feet to the Dead Sea. It must have been somewhere between Tekoa and the Dead Sea that Amos attended to his sycomores, for these trees are not found at a greater height than 1000 feet above sea-level.

The influence of Amos' surroundings is traceable in his book. Accustomed to the solitary, as well as the simple and strenuous, life of the desert, he views with dislike and contempt the idle pampered lives of the wealthy nobles and their wives in the cities of the North (iii. 12, iv. 1, vi. 4 ff.). His illustrations are freely drawn from the sights and sounds with which his desert calling had made him familiar: the pitiful remains of a sheep snatched by the shepherd from the mouth of the lion (iii. 12); the *roar* with which the lion springs on his prey, and the *growl* [a different Hebrew word] with which he devours it in his den (iii. 4). He notes that the unusual spectacle of two men walking together in the desert suggests that they are keeping a tryst (iii. 3). The perils to which his calling exposed him from lions, bears, and serpents, suggest one of the most graphic of his pictures of the inevitable woes that the guilty nation will have to face (v. 19). But his travels as a wool-merchant, during which he would meet with men from many lands, must have greatly added to his knowledge. He has heard of the inundations of the Nile (viii. 8); he knows all about the Philistine slave-traders (i. 6), and the frequent outbreaks of plague in Egypt (iv. 10); he is well acquainted with the history of all the surrounding peoples (chaps. i. and ii.); he is aware of what were the original homes of the Philistines and the Aramæans of Damascus (ix. 7).

Amos' pen is that of a ready writer. His style exhibits nothing of the 'rusticity' which Jerome discovered, or affected to discover, in it. On the contrary, it is on a level with the best models of classical Hebrew. To our Western minds this may appear surprising in view of the environment of the prophet, but, as Robertson Smith pointed out in his *Prophets of Israel* long ago (1882), it is quite in harmony with the conditions of Eastern society.

II

Date and Duration of Amos' Ministry

The title dates the ministry of the prophet 'in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.' These two monarchs were contemporaries during by far the larger part of their long reigns, the date of Uzziah's accession being *c.* 790, and his death 740; while the reign of Jeroboam II. may have extended from 783 to 743 or possibly 741. Practically all scholars are agreed that 760 is the earliest possible date for Amos, and most of them assign his ministry to 755–750. It has been plausibly argued (*cf.* Cripps, *Commentary on Amos*, 1929) that the date should be placed as late as 742 or 741. The question is bound up with the political situation and prospects in the time of Amos in relation to Assyria.

Leaving out of account earlier expeditions by Assyria to Western Asia, we know that in the year 854 Ahab of Israel was defeated at Qarqar by Shalmaneser II.; and that in 842 Jehu paid tribute to the same monarch, as is recorded on the famous 'Black Obelisk,' now in the British Museum. Damascus suffered a notable defeat at the hands of Assyria in 802, and was so weakened that we can readily account for the three defeats of its king, Ben-hadad III., by Joash, King of Israel (2 Kings xiii. 17, 25). During a large part of the reign of Jeroboam II., the son of Joash, not only was he free from opposition by Damascus, but Assyria was engaged in a serious struggle with the Vannic Empire, so that the Israelitish king was able to make conquests far and wide, till his dominions reached the same limits as in the days of Solomon (2 Kings xiv. 25). It was not till the great Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III. began his career of conquest in the West from the year 745 onwards that ordinary observers would have seen any serious menace to Israel. At the same time it is true that as early as 755–750 there had been renewed activity on the part of Assyria sufficient to account for Amos' anticipation that it might be God's destined instrument of vengeance on Israel. To this we may add that there are reasons for holding that some time elapsed between the opening of Amos' ministry and that of Hosea, which must be dated immediately after the death of Jeroboam II., during the six months' reign of his son and successor, Zechariah. Upon the whole a date about 750 for Amos appears best to suit all the circumstances.

The date of the earthquake (which is referred to also in Zech. xiv. 5, 'As ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah') is uncertain. But its mention as the date of Amos' call to be a prophet raises several questions. If the references in Amos iv. 11, viii. 8, and ix. 5 are to this earthquake *as past*, may it not be that Amos became conscious of his call two years before he spoke the words contained in the above-cited passages? It may be asked also whether the two years were a period of silent preparation before *any* public utterances, or whether he delivered earlier messages than any contained in the book that bears his name. Further, there may well have been a considerable interval between some of the discourses—possibly an interval of two years between chap. ii. and iv. 11. There is really no reason to hold, as many do, that the prophetic ministry of Amos was confined to a single episode in his life, a visit to Bethel. In view of some of his utterances, it seems much more likely that he delivered discourses at other centres in the Northern kingdom, notably Samaria; and that in chaps. vii.–ix. we reach the climax of his ministry. There is no need to move these last chapters (which, we take it, describe his call) back to the beginning of the book, any more than there is to put the sixth chapter of Isaiah (which narrates his call) at the beginning of *his* book. Both chronologically and logically Amos vii.–ix. 8*b* appears to be in its right place.

If Amos' ministry extended over two or three years, this explains the growing clearness with which he saw that God's instrument of judgment on Israel was to be the Assyrians.

Although these are not named even in vi. 14, it is instructive to note the definiteness of that verse as compared with the vague language of ii. 14–16.

III

Analysis and Contents of the Book

Whether soon, or some time, after a conscious call to the prophetic office, Amos, in the course of a visit to the Northern kingdom, felt impelled to deliver the first of his discourses, probably at the capital, Samaria.

(1) *The First Discourse*, i. 2–ii. 16.—This commences with an announcement of imminent Divine judgment on the surrounding peoples for repeated [such is the force of the expression 'for three transgressions and for four'] infractions of the generally recognized rules of humanity.

In vv. 3–6 the Aramæans of Damascus, who for some eighty years (during the reigns of Omri, Ahab, Jehoram, Jehu, and Jehoahaz) had waged incessant war with the Northern kingdom, are charged with great cruelty to the Israelites settled east of the Jordan. This would apply especially to the atrocities perpetrated by Hazael during the reigns of Jehu and Jehoahaz (*cf.* 2 Kings viii. 12, x. 32 f., xiii. 7). Defeat in war, followed by exile, is the penalty that will have to be paid.

Amos turns next (vv. 6–8) to the Philistines, each of whose five cities, with the exception of Gath (which had apparently been already destroyed, perhaps by Hazael, *cf.* 2 Kings xii. 17), is named. Their crime, for which they were to be destroyed, was the raiding of defenceless villages and selling their inhabitants as slaves.

A similar charge is brought against Tyre (vv. 9, 10), whose guilt is aggravated by the circumstance that the slaves in whom she dealt were her fellow-Phœnicians [this seems the most probable interpretation of the words 'and remembered not the brotherly covenant'].

Edom is denounced in vv. 11 and 12: 'because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity; and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever.'

The denunciation of Ammon follows in vv. 13–15. In their wars of aggression ('that they might enlarge their border') the Ammonites are charged with perpetrating horrible atrocities on the women of Gilead. As a punishment, Rabbah, their capital, is to be destroyed; and the people, together with their god [reading *Milkōm*, the name of the national god of the Ammonites, instead of *malkām*, 'their king'], shall go into exile.

Another inveterate foe of Israel was Moab, to whose king, Mesha, we owe the inscription on the 'Moabite Stone.' That inscription tells us how, during the reigns of Omri and Ahab, Moab was oppressed by Israel 'because Chemosh [the national god of the Moabites] was angry with his land'; and how Mesha in turn triumphed over Israel. In 2 Kings iii. 4 ff. we read of an attempt by Jehoram, the son of Ahab, to reconquer Moab, in the course of which Mesha, hard pressed in battle and driven to despair, offered his first-born son in sacrifice to Chemosh. In verse 26 of the same chapter we are told of a fierce attack made by Mesha on the King of Edom, whose participation in the invasion of Moab may have been specially resented. It was perhaps this same King of Edom whose grave was desecrated by the Moabites and his bones burnt to lime (Amos ii. 1)—an action which the prophet could denounce as an outrage on the universally recognized sanctity of the tomb. The fate of Moab is to be like that of Ammon.

The genuineness of the denunciation of Judah (vv. 4, 5) is denied by a great many commentators. It has even been proposed to expunge from the Book of Amos all references to Judah, and to confine the prophet's ministry entirely to the Northern kingdom. It is certainly true that Amos is concerned mainly with that kingdom, but could he have entirely omitted Judah in his survey of surrounding peoples?

Up to this point Amos would have the sympathy of his audience. They had no love for any of the peoples he had denounced, and would hear with pleasure of their approaching destruction. But now fall upon their ears the unwelcome words, 'For three transgressions of *Israel* and for four I will not turn away the punishment thereof.' Israel shall be judged as impartially as those other peoples, and shall no more escape punishment than they. The main charges brought against them are that their judges accept bribes ('they sell for silver the cause of those who are in the right'); creditors sell into slavery those who owe a trifling debt like that for a pair of sandals; the rich trample down the poor; there is widespread immorality, practised even in the name of religion with the *qĕdēshôth* ('sacred prostitutes') at the high places; when a poor man's cloak has been taken in pledge, the humane custom (*cf.* Exod. xxii. 26) of returning it before nightfall is disregarded; the money derived from fines is spent in drunken carousals at the sacrificial feasts. All this conduct exhibits base ingratitude to the God who in the past has bestowed on Israel so many favours, both material and spiritual. The complacency of the guilty nation shall presently be disturbed; their foundation shall shake as a cart shakes that is heavily loaded with sheaves; and, at last, they shall fall a prey to the sword of the enemy (vv. 6–16).

(2) *The Second Discourse*, iii. 1–iv. 3.—This discourse also was probably delivered at Samaria, possibly a considerable time after the first. It commences with what must have sounded as a startling paradox, the statement that because God has 'known' Israel alone of all the families of the earth, *therefore* He will visit on them all their iniquities. Their peculiar privileges have carried with them special responsibilities, of which they have failed to acquit themselves, and judgment is at hand. From a series of examples of how every event that happens has its sufficient cause, Amos argues that his own message is a proof that he has received a Divine call to prophesy. 'The lion hath roared; who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken; who can but prophesy?' Heathen peoples are summoned to testify to the social evils, the cruelty and oppression that are rampant in Samaria, and sentence follows the verdict of 'Guilty.' Only a pitiful remnant, if any, shall escape. The altars of Bethel shall be dashed to the ground, and the costly palaces of the nobles shall be demolished (iii. 1–15). The address closes with a bitter attack on the ladies of Samaria, who encourage their lords in their luxury and their evil ways, and shall share their doom (iv. 1–3).

(3) *The Third Discourse*, iv. 4–13.—The strange complacency of the people, in spite of their flagrant disregard of morality, was due mainly to their notion that by sacrifices and offerings they could secure the favour of God. But, however such a service might satisfy *them*, not a few past experiences might have convinced them that God was not satisfied. He had sought to win them to a true service by a series of judgments—famine, drought, blasting and mildew, pestilence and earthquake—but all in vain. Hence more drastic measures may be looked for. 'Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel' (iv. 4–12).

(4) *The Fourth Discourse*, v. 1–17.—Possibly enough this discourse was delivered on the following day. To impress his hearers more, Amos adopts in verse 2 the poetical rhythm known to the Hebrews as the *qînāh*, which was used in dirges for the dead:—

> She is fallen, no more to rise,
>   The virgin Israel.
> She is cast down upon her land,
>   With none to raise her up.

The land is to be depopulated, and the sanctuaries to which the inhabitants trusted shall prove things of nought. The prophet reiterates the charges of maladministration of justice, and of oppression of the poor, which he had made in his first discourse. In verse 15 he addresses to his audience the earnest appeal, 'Hate the evil and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.' But Amos knows only too well that his appeal will not be listened to. Accordingly, after, as we may imagine, a dramatic pause, he proceeds: 'Well then, wailing shall be in all the broad ways, and they shall say in all the streets, Alas, alas! . . . for I will pass through the midst of thee, saith the Lord' (v. 16 f.).

(5) *The Fifth Discourse*, v. 18–27.—A popular expectation seems to have prevailed of a coming 'Day of the Lord,' when Israel's God would interpose to deliver His people and execute judgment on their foes. In the present discourse Amos attacks this confidence. He admits that a Day of the Lord is approaching, but he gives quite a different complexion to it. The judgment executed on that day will be on Israel itself. Then follows one of the most striking passages in the book. The prophet, speaking in God's name, pours contempt on the whole of the ritual of which the people were so proud (*cf.* Isa. i. 10 ff.). In verse 25 comes the Divine challenge, 'Did ye bring unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years?' to which evidently the answer ex-

pected is ‘ No.’ That is to say, Amos practically denies that in the early days of its history (when, in common with Hosea, he holds the relation between Israel and its God to have been very close and intimate) ritual had any place (*cf.* to the same effect, Jer. vii. 22). The discourse ends with the definite threat, ‘ I will cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts.’ The reference is now clearly to the Assyrians, for no other power could have executed such a threat.

Unfortunately the force of verse 25 is blunted by an intrusion from a later pen (verse 26). The proper names appear to be, in a Hebraized form, the names of two Assyrian gods, Sakkuth, the god of war, and Kaiwan, the planet Saturn. The verb in the first clause may be construed either as a future (‘ therefore ye shall take up ’ your idols and carry them with you into exile) or as a perfect (‘ but ye carried about ’ these idols). The first rendering is inconsistent with the fact that Amos never charges the inhabitants of the Northern kingdom with idolatry, but only with an unspiritual worship of Jehovah ; and in any case they could hardly have learned in his time to worship *Assyrian* gods. Again, nothing could have been further from the mind of Amos or more inept for his argument than to allege that Israel *in the wilderness* practised idolatry, although this is the meaning attached to his words by the Septuagint version, which is followed by St Stephen, when he quotes the passage in Acts vii. 43. The verse was probably inserted long afterwards, with allusion to the idolatry introduced, according to 2 Kings xvii. 29 ff., into the Northern kingdom by the colonists settled there by the King of Assyria. If the opening verb is taken as a future, we have a threat that exile shall once more be the portion of these idolaters. If we construe it as a perfect, the meaning would be : ‘ (Did ye bring to me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness), and did ye [then, as ye do now] carry about idols ? ’

(6) *The Sixth Discourse*, vi. 1–14.—This also may have been delivered at Samaria. With biting contempt the prophet inveighs against the idle, luxurious, gluttonous, and drunken lives of the ruling classes. Captivity is again definitely threatened (verse 7). Pestilence appears to be suggested in verse 8, while verses 9 and 10 draw a ghastly picture of a household of ten, all of whom but one have fallen victims. When a kinsman comes to bring out the dead, he calls to the sole survivor, who is cowering in the innermost part of the house, ‘ Is there no one else left ? ’ On receiving the answer ‘ No,’ the kinsman apparently utters an ejaculation such as ‘ The Lord have mercy upon us ! ’ whereupon the survivor, afraid of the discharge of a fresh avalanche of the Divine wrath, says, ‘ Hush ! It is not safe to mention the name of the Lord.’ ‘ This reveals another side of the popular religion which Amos has been attacking. We have seen it as the superstition of routine ; but we now know that this was a routine broken by panic. The God who in times of peace was propitiated by regular supplies of sacrifice and by flattery, is conceived, when His wrath is roused and imminent, as kept quiet only by the silence of its miserable objects. The false peace of ritual is tempered by panic ’ (Sir G. A. Smith, *The Twelve Prophets*, 1928, p. 187). The closing verse (14) has clearly in view the Assyrians : ‘ I will raise up against you a nation, and they shall afflict you from the entering in of Hamath unto the brook of the Arabah ’ (*i.e.* from the extreme north to the extreme south of the dominions ruled over by Jeroboam II.).

(7) *The Seventh Discourse*, vii. 1–9.—The climax of the ministry of Amos is reached at Bethel, where probably he spent three days, on each of which he addressed an audience assembled for some great festival. He now gathers up all the essential points in his previous discourses, and explains how he was inspired to deliver his message.

In the first discourse he tells of three visions in which he recognized his call to be a prophet. We can well imagine how, in the course of his meditations in the Wilderness of Tekoa, Amos reached a growing conviction that the sins of Israel would inevitably bring upon them judgment at the hand of God. What form that judgment would take he was at first uncertain. In the first two ‘ visions ’ locusts and fire (which perhaps stands for drought) threaten to destroy the land ; and the prophet tells how, at his prayer, these plagues were averted. But after the third ‘ vision,’ suggested by the spectacle of a man testing a wall with a plummet, he is convinced that, when the plummet is applied to the structure of Israelitish society, the condition of this is hopeless, and judgment is inevitable. Hence, speaking in God’s name, he declares: 'I will not again pass by them any more; and the high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuary of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword' (verse 9). This utterance closed the address for the day.

Now comes an interlude (vv. 10–17), describing the interposition of Amaziah, the priest at Bethel. The course of events seems to have been as follows. Amaziah, hoping to receive authority to arrest, or at least to silence, Amos, sent to inform the king of the treasonable utterances of this visionary fanatic from Judah; but Jeroboam, probably actuated by a good-natured contempt, declined to interfere. Accordingly, when Amos presented himself the following day to resume his address, Amaziah could do nothing more than advise the prophet in very contemptuous terms to go home to Judah, where he might prophesy to his heart's content and make a living by utterances suitable to the wishes of his hearers. But let him not intrude his presence at the royal sanctuary of the North. Amos in reply repudiated the idea that he was a professional prophet; he had no connection with the society or guild known as 'sons of the prophets'; he was no hireling, out to make gain by prophesying smooth things; he had left his sheep and his sycomore-trees in obedience to an irresistible Divine call, to deliver a special message. Finally, he solemnly warns Amaziah that he and his wife and family shall be involved in the fate with which the land is threatened. In all probability the bullying priest was cowed and dared not offer any further opposition. There does not appear to be the slightest ground for holding that Amos was silenced, and that the rest of his message was simply *committed by him to writing* after his return to Tekoa. On the contrary, turning from Amaziah to the people, he delivered—

(8) *The Eighth Discourse*, viii. 1–14.—First of all we have a fourth 'vision,' that of a basket of summer fruit (*qaiṣ*), the name of which suggested to the mind of the prophet the word *qēṣ*, 'end'; and the message came to him from God: 'The end is come upon my people' (verse 2). This is followed by a denunciation, introducing some fresh points regarding the abounding social evils, notably the grudging by employers of the rest of the Sabbath to their employees; their resentment at the interruption which the recurrence of that day imposes on their money-making; and the use of false weights and measures by traders. The very earth may tremble, and the sun be darkened [suggested perhaps by the total eclipse of the sun in 763], in view of all this wickedness. The people who at present despise the word of God as spoken by the prophet, shall in the end 'run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it' (verse 12).

(9) *The Ninth Discourse*, ix. 1–8*b*.—The final discourse opens with a fifth 'vision,' that of God standing by the altar at Bethel, and calling for its destruction and for the crashing down of the temple upon its worshippers. From the coming judgment *not one shall escape*. Neither heaven nor Sheol, neither the heights of Carmel nor the depths of the sea shall save them from the vengeance of God. They may ask, 'Have we not a special claim on the God who brought us up out of the land of Egypt?' 'No,' is the reply of Jehovah, 'no more claim than the Philistines, whom I brought from Caphtor, or the Aramæans, whom I brought from Kir' (verse 7). In all probability *the last words of Amos were*: 'Behold the eyes of the Lord are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth' (verse 8*a*, *b*).

It was not unusual [we see this notably in the Book of Jeremiah] for a later hand to soften prophetic utterances of unmitigated severity. Hence we are not surprised to find an example of this tendency in verse 8*c*: 'Saving that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the Lord.' Then follow words in which judgment is to have the effect of sifting the grain from the chaff—a true enough thought, and one which finds support elsewhere in the Old Testament, notably in Isaiah, but is quite alien to the spirit of Amos and flatly contradicts what immediately precedes.

Later still was added the closing passage of the book (vv. 11–15), which implies that the *Southern* kingdom ('the tabernacle of David') has fallen, and its inhabitants are in exile. Brighter days are in store; the people are to be restored to their own land, and an era of material prosperity is to be ushered in which contains features that would scarcely have appealed to Amos, and has *no moral background at all*. It is now almost universally agreed by Old Testament scholars that Amos was a prophet of Doom, but not of Deliverance.

IV

The Permanent Value of the Book of Amos

Its doctrine of God is the all-important feature. This is usually called by the name 'ethical monotheism.' Whether Amos reached absolute monotheism, viewing Jehovah as the Lord of the whole universe, or not, he certainly struck a deathblow at the prevailing 'monolatry,' which, while admitting the exclusive right of Jehovah to the service of Israel, recognized the existence of other gods, with a right to the service of other nations. It is worthy of note that he never uses the phrase 'the God of *Israel*.' With him 'the Lord of hosts' comes nearly, if not entirely, to stand for the universal Lord of all creation. It is true that 'ethical monotheism,' was present in germ in Mosaism, and a prophet like Elijah contributed to its final triumph. But Amos goes beyond his predecessors in the clearness of his teaching, and falls little short of the height reached by the Second Isaiah. In fact, if the so-called 'Doxology' passages (Amos iv. 13, v. 8 f., ix. 5 f.) are from his pen—and it has never been proved that they are not—he can hardly be said to fall short at all. In any case he laid a new emphasis on the *character* of Jehovah as a moral Being. The people fondly imagined that their God would always stand by them, irrespective of their moral conduct. The lack of social righteousness gave them no concern, provided they conciliated Jehovah by sacrifices and offerings. Hence Amos showed once for all the valuelessness of a merely ritual religion. Jehovah, as a moral Being, demands moral conduct; as a spiritual Being, He demands spiritual service from His worshippers.

The one point in which we feel something to be lacking in Amos' teaching, is that, corresponding to his own temperament, the stern side of the Divine character is so emphasized as to leave little place for a tender side. He taught, and taught truly, that 'God is Righteousness,' and that social righteousness is expected of His servants. It was left to his younger contemporary, Hosea, to teach that 'God is Love.'

J. A. Selbie

The Dark Days

Amos i. 1.—'Two years before the earthquake.'

That is how the prophecy of Amos, the herdsman of Tekoa, is dated. Thus he himself fixed the beginning of his mission—it was 'two years before the earthquake.' Some time in the fifty years' reign of Uzziah Jerusalem had been shaken and its people had fled in terror; the Mount of Olives had been torn open, and it seemed as if the last days of earth had come with mighty convulsion. It was an experience that shaped the calendar for many a year to come. The people dated things by it, as once they had dated them by the deliverance from Egypt. And on the mind of a lonely man out in the wilderness of Tekoa, who saw and felt it with that sensitiveness of a child of Nature which all his book betrays, it made an indelible mark, so that he referred all that had befallen him before, and all that came after, to that unforgettable day.

1. There is a common measure of time and a private and personal one. History is strewn with forgotten way-marks of time which once were agreed upon in common use. A world-shaking victory, the foundation of a city, the birth of a dynasty, the dawn of a creed—such things have been taken as new starting-points for time. But now for nineteen centuries we have marked each year 'Annus Domini,' and our chronology carries the signature of Christ. Very wonderful is this miracle of the changed calendar. To write a signature on Time itself, to put a human name on the brow of the centuries! Christ alone towers high enough above the horizon of history to serve as the time-measure of the living world.

But there is also a private and personal measure of time. We have our own way of reckoning our years. We date by events and experiences. When Jacob was an old man and near his end, he recounted his life-story to his son Joseph. And this is how he begins: 'God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz, in the land of Canaan, and blessed me.' But there was something before that. Yes, but this is the big date. It was his second birth. There on the lonely uplands happened the thing that changed his life. Then the old man leaps to another date in that private and personal almanac of his—a day that had broken his heart: 'When I came to Padan, Rachael died, and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath, the same is Bethlehem.' Ask Isaiah to tell of the history of his work. The tale begins: 'In the year that King Uzziah died.' That was not a figure on a calendar only; it was an experience. When Uzziah died, a greater King became visible. Ask Hosea of his making as a prophet, and the tale will begin on the dark day when his own home fell in ruins about his head. Then it was that he learnt the compassion of God out of the pity of his own heart. There is a sermon of Ezekiel with this footnote, which carries a world of pathetic revelation: 'I spake to the people in the morning, and at even my wife died.' That day was fixed for ever in his mind. He went home to find his house desolate. When a child learns a task, it says, 'I have it by heart now.' And that is a child's way we never outgrow. Memory and heart are closer kin than even memory and mind.

Most of us have some all-subduing dates. 'Two years before the earthquake,' we say. There was a breakdown in health, and it cut life in two; before and after runs the reckoning. Or it was a heavy loss, or a bitter sorrow, or an incredibly foolish mistake, or a long-drawn misunderstanding, and just where it came in there is a line drawn across the years. Two years before that means something different from every year since.

¶ Mr Boreham tells the story, in one of his books, of a poor, faded little woman giving proof in Court of the signing of a certain paper. Various questions are put to her and she answers as follows: 'So you saw the paper signed, did you?' 'Yes, sir.' 'And you say it was the 30th of August on which the paper was signed?' 'Yes, sir.' 'You take your oath it was the 30th of August?' 'Yes, sir.' 'Well, now,' persisted the questioning counsel, 'would you be so good as to tell us just how you know it was the 30th of August?' 'I know it was,' she cried, in a tone of fresh affirmation, 'for it was the day on which my baby died.'

2. There is no lesson in the wisdom of life more necessary to learn than what to do with our dark dates. What is our attitude to them? What are they doing for us? What are we doing with them? There are three things needful for us—that we escape their tyranny, that we harvest their blessing, that we let them prepare us for the next.

(1) That we escape their tyranny is the thing we perhaps need most of all. For they can tyrannize over us, shadowing our lives, sapping our strength. Many a man and woman has allowed one shattering experience to become an obsession of the mind. Its wounds have healed, the rawness has gone, and the pain has passed, but the thing itself is companied with until it becomes a dweller in the mind that cannot be evicted. It is not an ill thing to question ourselves concerning the things we remember best. It is no bad token of our inward health. Do we remember slights better than kindnesses? Do we remember God's strange discipline better than His unfailing compassions, His rod more than His staff? It is a shallow and graceless heart that holds only the ill and lets slip the blessing.

But, indeed, there are majestic sorrows connected with these dark days that are not to be belittled. Only we must be sure that we stand rightly to them. They must be our servants and not our masters, and there are two ways by which we may defeat their threatened tyranny. The first is to cherish and cultivate a sense of purpose in life. And here Christ is our example. For He had His dark dates, and one of them was when the Cross took plain shape and unescapable certainty before His mind. We do not know when it was that it first became clear to His mind that He must suffer and die, but it was long before He came to Calvary, and probably at an early time. Yet though the shadow of it fell early, it sapped nothing of His consciousness of Divine purpose in His life, but rather fed and inspired it. Every day He went about doing good, bringing comfort and light to desolate and broken folk. The more surely was it made plain to Him that He must be a Man of Sorrows, the more urgently and increasingly did He pursue His holy task, and therein won joy for Himself, and a heritage for His friends, so that He could say as His will and testament, 'That my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.' Whatever dark days we have in memory's calendar, let us make sure we transform them into date-marks of willing service, holding them under the urgent consciousness of a purpose which we must needs work to fulfil.

The second defeat of the threatened tyranny of our dark dates is in the remembrance of our benefits. We so easily remember the one terrible year of the earthquake and forget the many years of security and plenty. Of all faculties memory is least sensitive to perspective and to the proportions of things. We use it too much like a field-glass held the right way to bring near and make vivid the unpleasant, but held the wrong way to set the good afar and make it microscopic. Is nothing to rise out of the past but the illness, the failure, the sorrow, the remorse? God has given us light and sunshine, and in the dark the stars to shine.

¶ One day at Ispahan, Ferishtah observed a man in beggarly attire selling melons. Looking closely at the man, it seemed to him that this melon-seller was a man he had known twelve years earlier as Chief Minister to the Shah. But he had fallen from his high estate. And for this change in his fortunes he alone was to be blamed. Not satisfied with what life had given him, he had thought to hasten to be richer still. He had risked his money in some foolish financial venture, only to be ruined and disgraced and thrust back into the world at its lowest rung where the fight is most pitiless.

Ferishtah hailed the melon-seller. ‘Can it be thou? Art thou he indeed who twelve years ago wast still the Shah's Prime Minister with Persia in thy gift! And now a seller of melons on the public highway, dependent for thy food on passers-by! Alas for thee, to have been raised by God to such an eminence as thou didst occupy, and then to be flung as from a tower to wolves. Art thou not tempted to listen to what Job's wife suggested to her afflicted husband—to curse God and die?’

‘Nay, but thou art foolish’—thus spake the melon-seller—‘to put the accent where thou hast put it. Why should I, and why should any one, dwell upon the greyness of one day or even the blackness, when he can project his mind to days and years of sunshine which were equally his? And why should I forthwith speak foolishly with my lips concerning God, who has been pleased to rebuke me publicly for my transgression? Was it not good that He, the All-Mighty, should manifest such care of me as to thwart me when I had thought by my sinful behaviour to elude Him? But—and this it may be is our more fitting speech concerning Him who is in all and through all and over all even in common fairness to life and to God, would I do well to bemoan the poverty which has befallen me, and forget entirely my years of plenty at His Hands?

‘Shall I not rather say, “This is my infirmity, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High”?’[1]

(2) The second needful thing is that we harvest their benediction. For even the day of the earthquake has gifts, and many a man has lived to look back upon the black date and find it turned into a point of light. There is an illustration of this in a quite incidental note in the story of Moses. We are told in parenthesis that Moses had two sons born while he was in exile, and the name of one was Gershom, and the name of the other was Eliezer. Gershom was the name of the first son, and the word means banishment, strangeness, separation, homelessness. It suggests the bitter contrast between Egypt and the desert, between the life of the Court which Moses had left and the privations of a wanderer. But the years passed, and Moses grew to see differently that seeming disaster which had rent his life. When his second child was born, his murmurings had been hushed; he had reached out his hand to grasp God's hand, and the little one was Eliezer, which means ‘God is help.’ It was worth while to be sent into the desert for a third part of his life and to have purposes and hopes broken short in order to learn that vital lesson which unlocks all the perplexities of Providence.

¶ Frederick William Robertson's highest ambition, as a young man, was to be a member of the regiment in which his father and grandfather had served so signally. Just after he had been offered a commission he received the call to the ministry. Only those who knew him intimately knew what it meant for him to turn his back on a military career, which had become a family honour, and to strike out in such a new path. But Robertson came to see that such experiences, which for the time bring poignant, searching, shattering disappointment, ultimately bring larger gains, fuller energies, more expansive beneficences, by which the world is enriched.

Who of us has not known lives smitten and burdened in a fashion which seemed intolerable, yet the will has been so strengthened and the spirit so nerved, the sympathies so widened, the outlook so enlarged, the springs of character so sweetened, that the blow is seen to be a blessing, and the burden a love-gift of God. There is the earthquake that removes the things that can be shaken, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain, and we may know the abiding from the temporal and fugitive.

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[1] J. A. Hutton, *Further Guidance from Robert Browning in Matters of Faith*, 12.

Ah, vain conceit that glory with its light
Could do the work of sorrow with its shade,
That faith's high triumphs could be won by sight,
Or man without the cross be God-like made.

(3) There is yet a third thing to learn, and it is that the dark dates already marked prepare us for whatever other dark experiences it may please God we should meet. Happy Amos in one thing at least. His eyes were opened 'two years before the earthquake.' It takes the earthquake itself to open the eyes of many. But when our eyes are opened, we are wise if, like Amos, we turn to the eternal steadfastness which is our security, and learn the way into that sanctuary of peace where the lamp of God's presence shines with tranquil and undimmed flame. Happy are those who have heard the Voice which says: 'The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.' Such a trust releases the heart from every fear.

Privilege and Responsibility

Amos iii. 2.—'You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.'

1. Pride is characteristic of nations even more frequently than of individuals; and though it may appear at first sight a comparatively venial fault, it is one of the most serious in its issues. It disdains to learn, and especially disdains to learn of those whom it accounts inferiors. How clearly we see this in the changing fortunes of nations and the disasters that lack of humility has ever brought in its train. The ancient Greeks, proud of their learning, their art, and their wealth, divided mankind into two classes: 'Greeks,' to be esteemed as equals, and 'barbarians,' to be contemplated with disdain from the lofty pinnacles occupied by the cultured race. Nothing was to be learned from these 'barbarians,' and in due course the luxurious, effeminate Greek was compelled to yield to the severer virtue and sterner discipline of the Roman he despised. Egypt, Rome, Spain manifest similar qualities, and incur similar punishment; and who will deny that in our own land a too vivid consciousness of skill, of power, of wealth, has frequently brought with it a contemptuous bearing that has drawn upon us the hatred of other peoples. 'God's Englishmen' was a noble phrase of Milton, and when we rise to his conception of England and of her work in the world, then, and then only, will our true and abiding greatness be secured. Too often there is need of the prayer of Rudyard Kipling in his finest poem:—

For heathen heart that puts her trust
In reeking tube and iron shard,
All valiant dust that builds on dust,
And guarding calls not Thee to guard,
For frantic boast and foolish word—
Thy mercy on Thy people, Lord!

It is not unnatural that pride should go along with a consciousness of high destiny, and especially where a people has accomplished much good work. Hence it is that we Britons are peculiarly imperilled, even as was Israel in ancient days. National pride was never more fully developed than among the Hebrews. Were not these tribes the favourites of the Eternal? Had He not given them a law of righteousness which exalted them far above other peoples? They beheld heaven-sent leaders in generation after generation—a Moses, a Joshua, a David, a Solomon; surely all these memories justified their pride in the past? They were an elect nation, and they knew that they were such. And from the fact of their election they drew certain conclusions—that their dominion should extend from sea to sea; that no matter what of peril the future might bring Jehovah would care for His chosen, and would ensure their victory. And certain other conclusions they also drew—that the remaining peoples of the earth were abandoned by God, devoted to destruction or, if permitted to survive the 'day of Jehovah,' then only allowed to remain as hewers of wood and drawers of water, the captives and bondslaves of the favoured nation.

It is easy to understand the influence which such a belief must have had upon the conception of Jehovah's moral demands, at any rate in the minds of the great bulk of the nation. However lofty the conception of Jehovah's character and of His ethical demands may have been in the minds of the spiritual leaders of Israel, there must always have existed, for the nation in general, the underlying comfortable conviction that, after all, the interests of the national God were bound up with those of His people, that He would, on the whole, be ready to look with a lenient eye upon their delinquencies, so long as His ritual was duly performed, and His altar heaped high with acceptable sacrifices.

2. The people of Amos' time had no doubt about their election, but they did not understand the reasons for it. They failed to realize that election to privilege is always election to duty and responsibility. But on the simple fact of their election Amos and his audience were at one; and they would listen with satisfaction to the comfortable doctrine that fell, in the first sentence, from the preacher's lips, and that seemed to flatter their national vanity —'you only have I known of all the families of the earth.' 'Therefore'—the preacher went on—and probably not one of his hearers had any doubt or misgiving as to what was to follow. From such premises there could be but one conclusion: 'therefore I will bless you abundantly. I will give you peace, prosperity, and victory. I will bless your going out and coming in, and set you on high above all the nations of the earth.' Jehovah was bound to do all this, bound by the covenant He had made with them and the favours He had already bestowed upon them—bound, at any rate, as long as they did their part; and their part, as they imagined, was to offer Him animal sacrifice and sumptuous ceremonial. What must have been their indignation when this strange preacher followed up his 'therefore' by the words, 'I will visit upon you all your iniquities'? They must have listened with an amazement which would break into fury to the audacious, blasphemous words of the rugged preacher. For blasphemous they must have sounded to those orthodox ears. His message was unwelcome, because it disturbed the comfortable equanimity of his audience, and dealt a blow at their most cherished convictions. Starting from the same premises, Amos reached a conclusion diametrically opposite to theirs, because his conception of the character of God was a whole world apart from theirs. The demands of the God he worshipped were for a just and honourable social life, and He would not be put off with ceremonial, however splendid. I will come and visit you indeed—not, however, to bless, but to smite you, *for all your iniquities*' —the intemperance, the immorality, and, above all, the oppression of the poor. The conclusion which so appalled his hearers was the most natural and logical in the world to Amos. Special privilege means special responsibility; and if that be evaded or mocked, then destruction is at the doors.

3. We may well ask ourselves the question, How was it that Amos, this simple countryman who lived his life for the most part in solitude, with few companions but his sheep and the wild beasts and birds of the hill-side, with no education in the prophetic schools of the time, should have hit upon a conception of God's moral demands, and of His working in the world, so lofty that it appears to religious thinkers at the present day to be fundamental? There is no other answer than that here we have the direct revelation of God put into the heart of one of the simplest—and perhaps for that reason one of the most readily receptive—of His servants. It is, in fact, the explanation which Amos himself gives, the fact that an effect implies, and indeed demands, an adequate cause:

The Lord Jehovah hath spoken:
Who can but prophesy?

His message, like everything else in the world, has a cause: he appears as he does and says what he says, because Jehovah has told him His secret—the awful secret of Israel's doom—and has sent him to declare it. The great cause which explains the prophet's appearance and justifies his message is Almighty God Himself. 'When the lion roars, who is not afraid? and when the Lord Jehovah speaks —and He has spoken loudly enough in the events of the time and to the soul of Amos—'who can help prophesying?' He preaches, because he must.

On his many visits to the markets of the north the prophet would see for himself evidence of the social evils of which he speaks; the ostentatious luxury and wealth of the few, purchased through exaction and oppression practised on the many; the drunkenness and immorality; the false weights employed in buying and selling; the hasting to get rich at whatever cost.

The simple explanation of all this social injustice, which was to cost the people so dear, is, as Amos says, *that they did not know* to do the straightforward thing, they had lost all ideas of right and wrong. But that did not excuse them. They did not know, but they should have known. In the mad haste after riches, in the dissolute luxury of city life, they had lost touch with the eternal facts, they had forgotten God's everlasting and inexorable laws. To such a civilization, with no heart for the needless sorrows of the poor, and no mind for anything but the exploitation of the weaker members of society, there can be but one end. The God whom it has insulted will smite it, the whole of it, the holiest and most cherished emblems of its religion, even the sanctuary of Bethel, hallowed as it was by ancient and precious traditions.

¶ It would appear that the unjust thing has no friend in the Heaven, and a majority against it on the Earth; nay that *it* has at bottom all men for its enemies; that it may take shelter in this fallacy and then in that, but will be hunted from fallacy to fallacy till it find no fallacy to shelter in any more, but must march and go elsewhither;—that, in a word, it ought to prepare incessantly for decent departure, before *in*decent departure, ignominious drumming out, nay savage smiting out and burning out, overtake it!

Alas, was that such new tidings? Is it not from of old indubitable, that Untruth, Injustice which is but acted untruth, has no power to continue in this true Universe of ours? The tidings was world-old, or older, as old as the Fall of Lucifer: and yet in that epoch unhappily it was new tidings, unexpected, incredible; and there had to be such earthquakes and shakings of the nations before it could be listened to, and laid to heart even slightly! Let us lay it to heart, let us know it well, that new shakings be not needed.[1]

4. If, as we hope and trust, we are in a true sense a privileged nation, are we guilty of the folly that ruled in Israel, boasting of our advantages as of privileges, and forgetting the corresponding responsibility? How vast is the heritage into which we have entered; born into a religious atmosphere free from traditionalism, permitting to every man freedom of access to the living God; possessors of a liberty of opinion and of utterance won for us by an ancestry that went cheerfully to prison for conscience' sake; citizens of a world-wide Empire whose vast territories supply the outlet for our missionary enthusiasm. Yet all too often we forget that our very freedom from persecution begets indifference to principle, whilst our citizenship of the British Empire is more often expressed in vain boasting than in earnest endeavour to understand its problems and to work for its social betterment. Let us ask ourselves personal questions. Have we knowledge? Have we culture? Have we leisure? Have we experience of the dealings of God in our own life? God has known us, and therefore will visit on us our iniquities, our neglects and omissions, as well as our positive wickedness. What are we rendering to Him for all His benefits?

God bends from out the deep, and says:
  I gave thee the great gift of life.
Wast thou not called in many ways?
  Are not My heaven and earth at strife?
I gave thee of My seed to sow:
  Bringest thou back My hundredfold?

Life's Noble Penalties

Amos iii. 2.—'You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.'

'You only have I known,' says God, 'of all the families of the earth; therefore I will smite you.' This remarkable conclusion startles us, but the more we let ourselves dwell upon the matter, the better we see that Amos was not astray. At the back of every privilege there lie strange penalties; for every advance we make, all favour we enjoy, there is a certain price to pay in this mysterious world; it seems to be a law in this dark universe that with everything we gain we should lose something. But if we view them in the light of noble penalties it may help us to be more cheerfully courageous, which after all is one of life's greatest victories.

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[1] Carlyle, *Chartism*, chap. v.

1. First, then, there is that *restless discontent* which has ever haunted human life: that dull desire, which may rise to a wild passion, to escape from the bondage and limit of ourselves. It is no chance that in the story of Eden the great temptation should have been to become as God. It is no accident that in the poems of Homer we should see man forgetting himself in hard fought battle, or voyaging heroically into untravelled seas. It is the valiant effort of the childhood of the race to appease the restlessness which is its birthmark. There is not a generation in all history but has its protest against human limitations. It is the secret of the fierce asceticism of the hermit: it is the source of the deep drinking of the sensualist. In a thousand heroisms, philosophies, crimes, sins, tragedies, we may trace the restlessness that haunts humanity. Now we must recognize that that is a noble penalty—not the curse of Cain but the gift of God. It is the inevitable price we have to pay for having been made a little lower than the angels. The dumb beasts in the pasture never feel it. They are content to browse and drowse and fatten. And had we been formed and fashioned just as they are, a life like theirs might have sufficed us too. But, somehow, the finger of God has touched humanity, the breath of the Divine has entered man, he has been wakened to kinship with eternal things; and the price he pays for that is a Divine unrest which may be transmuted into a thousand energies, but will never be satisfied in this life.

Prize what is yours, but be not quite contented.
  There is a healthful restlessness of soul
By which a mighty purpose is augmented
  In urging men to reach a higher goal.

2. Closely allied with this there is the great fact of *temptation*. It is a great fact, a universal fact; it is the one experience no man ever escapes. We may escape bereavement, violent pain, bodily accident, but no man ever yet escaped temptation. How subtle it is, how patient, how obsequious! How it bides its time to suit our mood and temper! We thought we had said farewell to it at five-and-twenty, but at forty, with a changed face, it is still whispering. It reaches us in the dearest relationships of home; it follows us through the crowded streets into the office; it goes with us into the silence and glory of God's world; until at last, deeper than all divisions, we come to apprehend our shadowed brotherhood, for we are all tempted men and women. What, then, is the meaning of that fact? May we not think of temptation as a noble penalty; as the price to be paid for our free will; as the inevitable struggle of a being who is great, just because he has been gifted with the power to choose? And though the struggle be not less keen when we think that, and though never a week may pass without some failure, still to be tempted now is not to be degraded; it is part of the cross which is our crown. Never let us say when we are tempted, 'This is degradation.' Say rather, 'God help me, this is my opportunity; I suffer this strain just because I am free.' So slowly, with every effort seconded by heaven, may a man draw nearer to true strength of character.

¶ Every evil to which we do not succumb is a benefactor. As the Sandwich Islander believes that the strength and valour of the enemy he kills passes into himself, so we gain the strength of the temptation we resist.[1]

3. Once more there are the cares and *difficulties of advancing life*. We do not deny that the sorrows of childhood are real, and not less real because we live to smile at them. There may be some who have suffered more acutely and intensely in their schooldays than they have ever suffered since. Still, in spite of all its miseries, youth had a freedom, and a certain irresponsibility about the heart of it, to which the man of forty or fifty may look back wistfully, for they have passed out of his life for ever. Life becomes more complex, its duties more intricate, its trials more manifold, until at last there may arise a vain desire for the happy freedom of a day long gone. But the burden of the days is after all a very noble penalty. It is what God exacts of us if we are

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[1] Emerson.

ever to know what love is, if we are ever to play our part among our fellows. It is the price we pay for launching out on to the deeps, instead of trembling like a coward on the shore. For with everything we gain, something we lose: that is God's way of it, and we are His children. We cannot have and spend, says the old proverb, and for once a proverb is divinely true. So when life becomes greyer, sterner, more severe, when love has had its tragic hours of suffering, the man who is wise will never give way to murmuring: he is paying his way into life's richest territory.

4. Again, there is a certain *bewilderment in matters of the faith.* There is a strange unsettlement in spiritual spheres that makes a simple faith almost a heroism. There are ages which are called ages of faith; there was little in all science that a man could learn that contradicted even the letter of the Scripture. So the wisest minds, and the most inquiring intellects, being fashioned to find their only rest in God, as we all are, bowed down, in a simplicity of childlike faith, before the oracles of Holy Writ. How different is the atmosphere to-day! What discordant voices are sounding in our ears now, till a young heart can hardly tell what is the truth. And so a vast multitude become indifferent; for indifference is always the refuge of the coward. An age of doubt, then, and of strange bewilderment; of groping in the dark if haply we may find Him; until, when the pressure is severe, we are half tempted to wish for the older days of a quiet faith again. But the past is gone; no prayers will bring it back to us. It is irrevocable, and God means it so. No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit, says Jesus, for the Kingdom of God. As soon yearn back from the nobler toils of manhood to the innocence unsullied of the child. We must go forward, we must accept the facts; we must say this unsettlement is but a noble penalty; it is the loss that was inevitable in our gains. If it were *error* that were causing all this trouble, we might say, God help us, we are sadly astray. But it is not error, it is the truth of *fact*, wrested, with infinite toil, from twenty fields. And if we cannot translate it at once into evangelical speech, and if we cannot adjust it yet with God's unchanging word, that is our noble and temporary penalty. For the faith will become wider, and richer, and far more impregnable than any that the world has ever known, for it will have room within its arms for every truth that patience or genius can gather from the world, and in the centre of all is an unvanquished Christ.

¶ 'You remember how, after the war,' says Professor Gossip, 'men coming home to an utterly changed world felt puzzled and unhappy and a little frightened, till General Smuts steadied us with that fine rallying cry, "Humanity has struck its tents, and is once more upon the march!" And with that it came home to us that what was happening was not ruin but a thrilling adventure, that God was calling us, as He called Abraham, to leave home and go forth, not knowing where we went, but with the Divine assurance that, if we dared to follow, He was leading us into a better country; and the Divine warning, honestly given, that for a time we might feel strangers and foreigners and outcasts, and be tempted to look back wistfully to dear familiar things, even to lose heart and turn back; and the Divine promise that, if we held on, He pledged Himself, as God is God, that our dream would come true, and our hope set into a glorious reality.'

5. Then there is the noble *sadness of the spiritual life.* In all true lives that are moved by the Spirit of Christ there is a shadow which there is no mistaking, which does not mean that religion is a gloomy thing. A dull and austere piety is not true to the lineaments of our Redeemer. But, somehow, into the music of Christendom there has come a minor note that the world was once a stranger to: life is more grave, more serious, more awful, than the laughter-loving ancient ever dreamed of; and the light-hearted gaiety of pagan faith—one of the first features in it to arrest us—has vanished from the religious life for ever. Is that a blot, then, upon Christ's escutcheon? It is one of the noblest penalties of all. It is the price we pay for that Divine enlargement which Christ has brought into the heart of life. We know what sin is now as the old world never knew it; we have thoughts of God which are infinitely lofty; we have heard the cry of the suffering and the poor; we have received the outlook of an eternal destiny; and if all this should have touched the life of Christendom,

not with joylessness, but with a certain noble sadness, it is but a small penalty to pay for such a gain.

A Spirit of Unity

Amos iii. 3.—'Can two walk together, except they be agreed ?'

Wherever there is order, beauty, truth, there is harmony. Its basis is the complete agreement of the component parts which together form a perfect unity, whether in art or in life. Wherever unity is, God is; wherever there is discord, God cannot be. For 'He laid the key-note of all harmonies; He planned all perfect combinations.'

And wheresoever, in His rich creation,
Sweet music breathes—in wave, or bird, or soul,
'Tis but the faint and far reverberation
Of that great tune to which the planets roll.

1. The Kingdom of God which our Lord consistently preached was an ideal of ordered and harmonious social life which involved then, and still involves, a drastic revolution in the ordinary man's scale of values. It demanded, not as an academic theory, but as a living reality, the brotherhood of men. It struck at the roots of materialism and superseded not only class interests but racial distinctions. The gospel of the Kingdom insisted that each individual owed responsibility to the community, and through the community to mankind.

And further, our Lord laid His fearless hand upon the outward observances of religion. Temple, altar, and ritual He declared to be effective only when they expressed the worship of God in terms of purest spiritual reality. On this basis He founded His Church, and charged its members to show to the world a oneness of heart and purpose, so that the world would recognize them by their likeness to Himself. 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.'

Man cannot approach his Maker, much less can he walk with Him, unless he be agreed with God and God with him. And if the revelation of Christ as to the nature and character of God be true, it simply means that our hearts, if God we seek to know, must throb in sympathy with the heart of the Divine. Society moves in peace and concord or in the reverse, according as the lives of men are, or are not, adjusted in a true relation to the mind of God which Christ manifested as passionately desiring the fellowship of His children.

This fundamental law of Christian life which conditions its harmony is summed up in that arresting and wistful expression of our Lord's: 'I have called you friends.' He did not say, 'I have called you all to think exactly alike.' Nor did He evidence our modern enthusiasm for hammering individuality down to the level of the mediocre. His followers were people of strong and varied opinions. They argued and disputed, and what they taught was not infrequently subject to dissimilarities, which occasionally gave rise to friction. Some were hot-headed and hot-blooded, some were clever and some were dull, some severely practical and some contemplative and theoretical. This, of course, since they were human, caused at times a heavy strain upon their fellowship, but no clash of tongues or opinions, however heated, ever succeeded in obliterating their consciousness of Christ's presence with them. They might think along different lines, cherish individual preferences, pursue their own peculiar ideals—and, after all, it is man's duty to be the first edition of himself—but they were and remained friends in Jesus Christ. They could live and work together because they were agreed in Him. The irresistible attractiveness of the bright-souled young Hero who was their Master, which was a magnetism of sheer glorious personality, drew the disciples to Him, and so entirely changed them that it drew them to each other.

¶ Scott's last expedition consisted of sixty-five members—brave men and representative of many interests and grades of life—who lived together in that ice-bound region with their leader. It is only when you read the Journals that you realize how many causes of friction there must have been in that difficult existence. But what are Captain Scott's own words? 'Never could there have been a greater freedom from quarrels or troubles of all sorts. I have never heard a harsh word or seen a black look. It is glorious to realize that men can live together under conditions of hardship, monotony, and danger, in such bountiful good-comradeship and harmony.' During the weary months in the hut from January to November, 1911, Captain Scott has many references to their unity. They may be summed up in the following striking witness: 'I do not suppose that a statement of real truth—that is, there is no friction at all—will be believed. It is so generally thought that the many rubs of such a life as this are quietly and purposely sunk into oblivion. With me there is no need to draw a veil—there is nothing to cover up.' Here, then, were men dwelling together in complete harmony and unity, and the question arises, How was it done? There is only one answer. It was their unbounded belief in their leader.

2. Is not this the gospel which our squabbling and turbulent age has largely forgotten, and in which alone lies the hope of its regeneration? In education and scientific achievement we may be going from strength to strength, but the drab poverty of our souls is shamed by the very greatness of our works. It is not the differences of opinion and divergences of religious and political thought that create the sordid mess of social injustice, class hatreds, wrongs, and suffering which cast a blight upon our era. It is the suspicion, the greed, the selfishness that blaspheme that friendship to which Christ called His followers.

Uniformity is a dreary business. There is no uniformity in Nature. No two human beings, no two stars, no two flowers in all the universe has the great Designer made wholly alike. Nor do we believe that uniformity of mind among men is desired by the mind of God. It is diversity of view, opposition of ideas, conflict of intelligences that constitute the power station which generates the force which drives into motion the machinery of corporate life. It is opinion striking against opinion that sends forth the sparks which ignite the lamp of truth. Our need is not to sink our differences. It is earnestly to distinguish between prejudice and principle, and, loyal to our convictions, to attune them with our neighbour's on the keynote of sympathetic understanding and Christian love; so that the barricades will be lowered sufficiently that across them we may look into a brother's eyes, and reach out to clasp a brother's hand.

¶ In the last year of his life, the Bishop wrote to Dr Guinness Rogers, one of the best known of the leaders of English Nonconformity: 'To me it is the most painful truth of our inadequate hold on the principles of Christianity that the profession of those principles should be a cause of disunion and bitter feeling. Attempts to remedy this fail because they conceive *unity* as something external and structural. When we look at the development of the world, we see increasingly varied opinions kept within useful limits by a general sense of the common welfare. I can conceive of a Christian Commonwealth, consisting of bodies of believers each with opinions of their own about matters of organization, understanding one another, and respecting one another, yet conscious of a common purpose, which transcends all human methods. An Italian friend of mine quoted in a letter a saying of a Greek Bishop—that our systems were necessary protections against the storms of the world, but though the walls might be thick below, they all opened to the same heaven.'[1]

3. 'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?' We cannot fulfil our chief end, which is to glorify God, unless our spirits be in harmony with the spirit of Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. 'I have called you friends.' And the unity of friendship is not necessarily that of opinion, but most necessarily that of heart. If this be ours our differences need not divide us, nor our controversies leave us unkind. If we take life with any measure of gravity, and if we are sincere, we will find that to whatever religious or political party we belong our common idealism is centred in a great historic fact, namely, the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ and all that it implies for the collective life of mankind. From that Cross we go our several ways, and our paths must diverge. In the task of applying its healing power to a troubled world we will not all act or think alike. But in one acknowledgment at least we are at one—that at best we are but blundering sinful men and women with souls to be saved and sins to be forgiven, and there is only one Saviour who can do it. We know, too, that only when our wayward lives are brought into harmony with His righteous will and loving heart can they ever know peace or be at rest. We can walk in safety only when we learn to walk together as friends in Him who is the Friend of man.

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[1] *Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton*, ii. 472.

There are signs that the ears of this groping, disillusioned generation are turning to listen to that cry across the ages: 'I have called you friends.' If Christendom can but be faithful to its trust a day will come, in God's good time, when the praises which men raise to Him will be not only with their lips but in their lives, and when they will worship in a reality we have never known; when in a Society delivered from the love of luxury and the pursuit of vanity, and in a common life freed from selfish rivalries and mellowed with the love and friendship of Jesus Christ, not alone in these temples where His honour dwelleth but in every place shall be lifted in truth the hymn of adoration—'All the earth doth worship Thee, the Father everlasting.'

Justice and Righteousness

Amos v. 24.—'But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.'

THIS is one of the finest utterances in the Hebrew Scriptures. Never did prophet or psalmist urge with such force and terseness the claims of moral rectitude to rule our conduct. Doing the right and loving thing towards our fellow-men is henceforth to be regarded as the essence of religion. Justice and equity, so long neglected and forgotten, are now to fill the whole land as with a flood of vivifying waters. The stream is to be not only mighty but constant. It is not to be a torrent which is soon swollen and as soon dried up—that kind of deceptive brook so common in the East, to which Job, in one passage, reproachfully compares his friends—but a river flowing at all seasons, which never fails. This return to justice is to be no sudden and transient reformation; it is to become the permanent regulating factor of the national and individual life. What the prophet intends us to understand by 'judgment' and 'righteousness' is not difficult to discover. He did not give any new meaning to these words, but used them in their popularly-accepted sense. By judgment he signifies what we should nowadays understand by justice—that virtue which impels us to give every man his fair due. And righteousness is but another name for social morality. It includes our duty towards the weak, the defenceless, the oppressed, the ignorant, the poor, the outcast. So Amos, the father of written prophecy, strikes the note which runs through all subsequent prophetic writings, that note of passionate enthusiasm for righteousness as the be-all and the end-all of life which marks out the Hebrew prophets as the foremost teachers of religion. The God of Amos is, before all things, a righteous God, and his only service consists in upright conduct.

The righteousness for which Amos pleads is a social thing: it is tender regard for the poor, hatred of the evil conditions that have dwarfed their lives; it is the spirit which yearns and works for the removal of those conditions; it is, in a word, respect for personality, fair play as between man and man. Let justice, in that sense, run through society, unimpeded by avarice or selfishness or cruelty; let it roll on 'like a perennial stream,' which, even in the fiercest heat of summer, never dries up. That is the true service of God—that, and not a gorgeous ritualistic display; that, and not meal-offerings and fat beasts.

¶ Our modern prophet, Ruskin, says, 'This is the one thing constantly reiterated by our Master—the order of all others that is given oftenest—"Do justice and judgment." That's your Bible order; that's the "Service of God," not praying nor psalm-singing. . . . He likes honest servants, not beggars. So when a child loves its father very much, and is very happy, it may sing little songs about him; but it doesn't call that serving its father; neither is singing songs about God serving God. . . . And yet we are impudent enough to call our beggings and chauntings "Divine Service"; we say "Divine Service will be performed" (that's our word—the form of it gone through) "at so-and-so o'clock." Alas! unless we perform Divine Service in every willing act of our lives, we never perform it at all. The one Divine work—the one ordered sacrifice—is to do justice; and it is the last we are ever inclined to do.'[1]

We see that Amos was addressing a people who were perpetually assuring themselves that Jehovah would be with them, *must* be with them, because they were His chosen people and faithfully attended the places of worship and paid their dues and more. No! says Amos. Not on your ceremonial terms, but on His moral terms: that is, if you seek what is good with all your heart, if you carry the spirit of justice into your social and institutional life—

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[1] *The Crown of Wild Olive.*

so, and no otherwise, will Jehovah be with you. He is the God of the whole earth and not of Israel alone, and He will estimate Israel by the same broad, moral standard as that by which He will judge other nations. It is noteworthy that the prophet never speaks of the 'God of Israel.' The people thought of Him as a national God, the prophet thought of Him as a moral God bound only to vindicate that moral order which no people can break through with impunity. 'Seek good and not evil, that ye may live; and so the Lord the God of Hosts shall be with you. . . . Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.'

2. This magnificent figure of speech suggests various reflections. Every river must have a source from which it springs. Now, whence does justice derive its origin? Is it to be found in the arrangement of human society, in laws of social convenience? No. It wells forth from the eternal constitution of the moral world, from the very nature of God Himself. God is a God of justice, and He has imposed this quality of His being upon the world which He has created. Every exercise of the principle of justice is a recognition of the fact that all men are created in the Divine image and are members of one human family. The claim to equitable treatment which any man makes of any other is grounded in the truth that both are sons of one Heavenly Father. In the words of the last of the prophets: 'Have we not all one father, and hath not one God created us? Why, then, do we deal treacherously every man against his brother?' And how mighty is the current of this Divine stream that flows through the world! There is a power in righteousness which only the morally blind can overlook. That State is strong in which a high standard of social righteousness is maintained, whilst injustice, oppression, corruption, and deceit are detrimental to the true interests of any community.

3. The crux of all the problems of civilization is to get these two factors—religious and economic—into right relations with one another. This, indeed, is the problem that underlies all other social problems to-day, and the Bible will be our best guide, prophet, and friend in solving it.

¶ The two great forming agencies in the world's history have been the religious and the economic. Here and there the ardour of the military or the artistic spirit has been for a while predominant, but religious and economic influences have nowhere been displaced from the front rank even for a time; and they have nearly always been more important than all others put together.[1]

Of course, in every time the Church has taught right personal relations within the accepted social system. If it was slavery, it has taught kindness on the part of master and obedience on the part of the man, as in the epistle of St Paul sent by a returning slave to his master. If in feudal times it has taught generosity to lord and service to serf, under our wage system it teaches square dealing on the part of both parties, the while it seeks to create an atmosphere of fellowship and goodwill. But has the Church no function to perform in changing the systems for the better?

There are signs that some of our religious leaders are beginning to think earnestly in respect of the issues raised by the advent of the industrial democracy. During the war a group of English employers belonging to the Society of Friends issued a very significant manifesto, in which they declared that the old industrial relations should never be allowed to return. Instead, they proposed an industrial democracy: that is, representation of workers in the management of business, in the control of its processes, the nature of its product, the engagement and dismissal of labour, hours of work, rate of pay, welfare work, shop discipline, and so forth. There can be no doubt, they said, that a frank adoption of such means and ends in common would not only promote better relations between employers and workers, but make for greater efficiency.

¶ Dr Adams Brown, in his *Life of Prayer in a World of Science*, refers to the career of a famous American business man, Mr John J. Eagan, President of the American Cast Iron Pipe Company. His business interests were large and spread over many concerns, and in philanthropic enterprises he was as active as he was in business. He had been using his profits in a Christian way, for the good of his fellows, but what about the way in which his profits were made? He began to study his factory as a human enterprise, not abstractly, but in the lives of the men and women who were working for him. He went into their homes and found out how they lived. The result was such that a publicist found it possible to write about his works under the heading, 'The Kingdom of God in Industry.' He decided to surrender the control of the company of which he was president to a board in which the workmen should have direct representation. After his death his widow found a paper on which he had drawn up a balance-sheet of assets and liabilities. On the top of the right-hand column—the asset column—was the word 'God.'[1]

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[1] J. Fort Newton.

4. The emphasis in our day on economics does not mean that the supreme purpose of human history is simply the development of a just social system, in which the good things of this world are more fairly distributed. No, the struggle for justice is but one phase of a still wider struggle which covers the whole of life and is the condition of every achievement. But there is a physical basis of the spiritual life to which we cannot be indifferent, if men and women are to grow the wings of the spirit. In our large towns, and even on the countryside, people are living in conditions which make it difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the decencies, much less the dignity, of life. Often a whole family—sometimes more than one family—live in one room, without privacy, where no soul can be alone, where the spiritual life is like a fourth dimension. Physical disease and moral decay are inevitable, and it ill becomes anyone to say that human beings who are restless or sullen under such intolerable conditions are moved by greed for material gain. These and other social evils exist because we have not yet learned the Divine laws of community life. As God writes His laws in Nature, leaving man to find and apply them, so there is a Divine law of social justice awaiting discovery and application. The challenge of this quest is the pressure upon us of the Spirit of God, and in making trial of just ways God will reveal Himself in a new and more satisfying vision, as He was made known to the seers of the Bible in their long struggle as to how the Eternal shall be served, whether by dogma and ritual or justice and righteousness. During recent decades the wit of man, toiling in the physical realm, has opened to us a new experience of the reality and purpose of God in the lucid and wise order of the world. If, in the next few decades, a like inventiveness is devoted to enterprises of moral discovery, no one can foretell what may thereby be gained in the way of a new revelation of God in the fellowship and service of man.

Manifestly, if God is creating creators, any failure of men to apply their utmost inventive thinking to social problems inevitably delays His creative work. What God seeks to do is not to drive but to lead, and this requires men who have insight to discern His way and the heroism to follow the will of the Eternal. Ever the road lies at our feet, ever the angels of our better nature beckon us to the great adventure. Slowly, painfully, and in the midst of strife and confusion, our humanity climbs the steep ascent toward that City of Equity which its prophets have seen afar off—a city built by the hand of man moved by the Spirit of God.

Keep heart, O Comrade! God may be delayed
By evil, but He suffers no defeat;
Even as a chance rock in an upland brook
May change a river's course; and yet no rock—
No, nor the baffling mountains of the world—
Can hold it from its destiny, the sea.

At Ease in Zion

Amos vi. 1.—'Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria.'

Israel was at peace and their sense of security was not unnatural. Their own resources were abundant, their God was manifestly favourable, and they were resolved to retain that favour by their elaborate and costly worship at the various shrines, and by their enthusiasm for religion as they understood it. And, more than that, the capital cities both of Israel and Judah were considered to be wellnigh impregnable. As the mountains were round about Samaria and Jerusalem, so, they believed, would Jehovah be round about His people. Hence their confidence, which Amos derides, in the mountain of Samaria. Let the worst come to the worst, they had God and the mountains, and that would surely be enough. To this airy confidence, Amos retorts with his crushing 'Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria.'

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[1] *Methodist Recorder*, Dec. 1, 1927.

1. But let us see what this word has to say to us. For there is a wider application to this warning than perhaps we have ever considered. Is it not true that in the personal life of many of us to-day there is a lack of real seriousness with regard to our responsibility as Christians? To use a modern phrase, we are 'easy-going.' Sometimes it is with a mistaken idea of faith that we are 'at ease in Zion.' We have an idea that faith in our Lord is designed merely as the condition of bringing us into the place of permanent rest and blessedness. In reality faith is not a mere mental ecstasy; it is a moral energy. It is not the mere expression of our relationship with God; it is the starting-point of our fulfilment of that relationship. In the name of faith, therefore, to settle down and be 'at ease in Zion' is either a total misconception of the nature of faith, or a wilful insincerity in regard to the carrying out of its claim and its call. An idea of the Christian life as one of ease and happiness, of self-enrichment and self-enjoyment, is entirely opposed to the whole spirit of the New Testament revelation.

¶ The Bible holds out no prospect whatsoever of a time when religion will have become a walkover, but warns us, in language whose meaning is unmistakable, to gird up our loins for running a race that will challenge our strength to the uttermost. 'They that wait on the Lord,' says Isaiah in words that echo the heroic spirit, 'shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not faint'; or, as Brynhild says to Sigurd, they

shall set their throne on high,
And look on to-day and to-morrow as those that never die.

A difficult position to win: a difficult position to hold.[1]

But to-day we have largely lost the conception of the strenuous Christian life. The Church is suffering not so much from the antagonism of those without as from the apathy of those within. It is weakened not so much by the activities of its enemies as by the indolence of its friends. Its foes are not so much those who do wrong as those who do nothing and are content to do nothing.

Material prosperity often seems now, as it did of old, to obliterate the thought of spiritual responsibility. We become rich and easy-going. But when a man says to himself—even if he would never venture to say it openly: 'Soul, take thine ease,' that, according to the verdict of Jesus, is the language of the utmost folly. For while God is working in Zion and all the energies of the Holy Ghost are exerted to save and bless men, it is anomalous that those of us who profess union with Him should be less strenuous. We need to be aroused to the fact that while the promises of the gospel are 'without money and without price,' there is yet a very real price to be paid for the blessings of Zion. Henry Drummond once said that, while the *entrance fee* to the Kingdom of God is nothing, the *subscription* is all that a man has. Our Lord's own life is characterized by this one fact, more almost than by any other, that in it there was no ease. He was always at peace, but never 'at ease.' He was always contented, but always contending. He was never passive, but always passionate. There was nothing of self-ministry in Christ's life, nothing of the bed of ivory and the bowl of wine and the pipe and viol. And it is still impossible for those who rightly understand their relationship with Him.

He so farre thy good did plot,
That His own self He forgot:
Did He die, or did He not?[2]

2. There are two lines by which we may arrive at some accurate self-knowledge in regard to this very thing. First, we are in danger of becoming 'at ease' concerning the shortcomings in our own individual lives. This is witnessed by our easy tolerance of sin; our ready excusing of things which the Word of God and our conscience unite in condemning; our allowance of things which once caused us to shudder as we considered the mere possibility of their entrance into our lives; the unconcern with which we regard our own falling short of the ideals of the Kingdom of God. We know that He has called us unto holiness, and we have a pretty accurate idea as to what holiness

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[1] L. P. Jacks.

[2] George Herbert.

is. We know what it is both in the inner and unseen life and in the outer and public life. And we know, too, where the failure comes in, where the lack of correspondence is, and yet we are content to be as we are. In the long run it is not the big passions but the little passions that betray us. Take such a common thing as temper. How many of us call ourselves Christian and yet manifest a temper which is a complete contradiction of the power of Jesus Christ to save. We put it down to temperament, and we are sometimes hypocritical enough to call it righteous indignation, when there is nothing righteous about it. It does not really trouble us one bit. We are just 'at ease in Zion.'

¶ Sir Ernest Shackleton was one of the greatest seamen in modern times. His voyages of discovery in the Antarctic proved him as a born leader of men and a real hero. It is related in a book of his life which was published shortly after his death, that when going on an expedition he was most careful in the selection of his men. He not only tested their general health and physique, but in his judgment the most important thing of all was the question of temperament. On one of his journeys he went 2000 miles out of his way to land an officer who had revealed the possession of a violent temper which he never tried to master.[1]

Or take the virtue of truth. It seems to many an innocent thing to tell certain kinds of lies—we have all fallen under the temptation—society lies, business lies, rhetorical lies, lies prompted by pure selfishness, lies prompted by mistaken kindness. The character whose doors lie open to these visitors is the character that is open to anything, and we are certain some day to be betrayed by them into larger and more fatal issues. Never let us forget that to have this easy-going, empty mind is the unsafest, unhallowedest thing in the world.

¶ Truth, whether in great or in little matters, Dr Johnson held sacred. I remember, on his relating some incident, I added something to his relation, which I supposed might likewise have happened. 'It would have been a better story,' says he, 'if it had been so; but it was not.'[2]

We must ever compare our lives with the ideal that we have embraced. Ruskin tells us with regard to art that ideals create restlessness, that the artist who has seen and embraced a certain ideal for his art will never rest until he has made his own work in some degree approximate to the pattern. So the man who takes his Lord's life as the guide of his own life, will be inspired with perpetual restlessness. He will never judge himself lightly. The man who realizes the heights and the depths of his own nature, the strange disloyalties and preferences which he evinces when confronted with the necessity of moral choice, the sleeping passion within him, which, when it is casually aroused, becomes utterly contemptuous of knowledge and warning and experience—the man who gets that knowledge of himself and his shortcomings will never be 'at ease in Zion.' It is then we realize how necessary it is in the midst of this earthly life, that sipes and soaks into our poor porous hearts on all sides, to lay hold on Christ, to make our spirit life not, as we so often do, a mere indulgence and luxury, but our severest athletic agony. It stands to reason that no indolent man can become pure and Christlike. He will never manifest to those who are watching his life the mighty victory of the Lord over temperament and heredity and environment, and over all the contending forces of evil. 'Woe unto them that are at ease,' for they are misconceiving and misrepresenting their Lord.

3. There is danger of being at ease regarding the still unfulfilled tasks of Christ's Church, regarding the still unfulfilled items of that programme to which Christ has commissioned His disciples. We know quite well what are the missionary responsibilities of the Church and its opportunities nearer home. We understand the social disorders of which the gospel is the only solution. We recognize the problems of young life—how to win for His Kingdom and His service all the bright, strong, teeming young life about us. But it does not kindle within us any flame of true vision and sacrifice. What does our Lord think of us, what does the world think of us, if, with our eyes wide open to see things as they are, we are content to let them be? It may be that we have no conflict with the cause, but we have no concern for it either. We have no antipathies, but neither have we any activities. We have no criticism of the workers, but we have no comradeship

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[1] J. W. Augur.

[2] Taylor, *Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ii. 457.

with them. And, with all, we have no prayer—or little, and there is no giving to the point of sacrifice and of disturbing the ease of our lives. If this is so, if not to act with God in these great moral and spiritual issues is to act against Him, 'woe' to the man who is 'at ease in Zion,' who deceives himself—who has no union with Jesus Christ, in whose life there is no expressed passion to save lives!

What is the meaning of this 'woe'? It is not a part of the Divine programme in the beyond. It is the working out of a natural law which overtakes man here and now, a certain Nemesis of selfish complacency. The worst that can ever come to us is but the perversion of the best. The manna kept and not eaten became corrupt and bred corruption. Light apprehended and not followed becomes darkness. The privileges of Zion become our positive peril. 'Woe' is this: that conscience ceases to protest against this unheeded remonstrance. Then blindness and deafness supervene, so that we neither see the need nor hear its clamant voices urging us to service, to self-discipline, and to consistent obedience. Blindness and deafness supervene until we come to think honestly and sincerely that spiritual ease is the one thing that is worth while. When a man comes to believe that there is nothing greater in life than his own conscious safety and his own present blessing 'woe' has overtaken him. So the issue for each one of us is as to our entire and deliberate obedience to Jesus Christ, or the pursuance of the path of selfishness which ends in darkness and in death.

The Son of God goes forth to war,
  A kingly crown to gain;
His blood-red banner streams afar:
  Who follows in His train?
Who best can drink His cup of woe,
  Triumphant over pain,
Who patient bears His cross below,
  He follows in His train.

Indifference

Amos vi. 6.—'They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.'

This prophecy of Amos, as we know, is directed against the rich, and the great, and the powerful in the land of Israel. They are charged with injustice and oppression and cruelty. But what crowns the charge against them is this: that, while they are enjoying every luxury themselves, they are altogether careless about the sorrows and needs of others. This is the charge that the prophet places above all others against his people. 'They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.' Theirs is the sin of social indifference.

Three thoughts suggest themselves.

1. There is the appeal to feeling—in the word Joseph. The word Joseph is significant. The Northern kingdom consisted of several tribes; among the chief were those of Manasseh and Ephraim, descended from Joseph, and so the mention of Joseph here is an appeal to patriotism—Joseph the great ancestor of these tribes, the favoured by Jehovah, the idol of the people.

Now, we may ask ourselves whether, in dealing with the question of social indifference, we may appeal to the same motive as the prophet of old did. There are a good many Christian men to-day who will advance the position that patriotism is a survival of a low state in man's moral development; that we should have grown beyond patriotism into a love of all mankind. It is argued that the Christian Church should know nothing at all of nationality, and that it is a denial of the universal brotherhood of man. It seems to us rather that the wider relationships will be all the more faithfully observed, and the duties they impose will be all the more efficiently discharged, if there be a regard for these closer relationships. For instance, the family need not come into conflict with the nation. Affection for our own homes need not lessen loyalty to our own country. Jesus Christ does not impoverish our life by reducing all to a monotonous uniformity. While there is unity that embraces all, that unity always means differences in the degrees of relationship, and so the Christian family, we may claim, is a permanent institution. No society will be a genuinely Christian society in which the family is not maintained as the home of the heart's warmest affections.

It is the same with nationality, with patriotism. Life is enriched by the differences of the nations, so long as each nation realizes that the fullness of its own life is not for itself alone, but ought to be offered freely to enlarge the life of other nations also. Of course, there is a patriotism that is quite unchristian. Any love for our country that means hatred of other lands, or suspicion of the foreigner, is not Christian. The only patriotism that is Christian is a concentration of human affection, so that it may be all the more intense. Surely, then, it can be made in our own land the motive of Christian appeal. The sacred record of the noble names that are recorded in the annals of our own land should be dear to us, as the name of Joseph was to his descendants in Northern Israel. But let us remember that, while we may appeal to patriotism, we never have the full Christian appeal unless we also appeal to humanity. We confess as God the Father of all; we trust a Saviour who died for all; we yield ourselves to the guidance and guardianship of that Spirit whose temple ought to be a redeemed humanity. So we to-day may appeal to patriotism—not a patriotism in antagonism to humanity, but as the concentration and intensification of humanity.

¶ 'Lowell's patriotism,' writes Sir Leslie Stephen, 'was not the belief that the country which had produced him must be the first in the world; or that the opinions which he happened to have imbibed in his childhood must be obviously true to every one but fools; or a simple disposition to brag, engendered out of sheer personal vanity by a thirst for popularity. It was clearly the passion which is developed in a pure and noble nature with strong domestic affections; which loves all that is best in the little circle of home and early surroundings; which recognizes spontaneously in later years the higher elements of the national life; and which, if it lead to some erroneous beliefs, never learns to overlook or to estimate too lightly the weaker and baser tendencies of a people. Most faiths, I fear, are favourable to some illusions, and I will not suggest that Lowell had none about his countrymen. But such illusions are at worst the infirmity of a noble mind, and Lowell's ardent belief in his nation was, to an outsider, a revelation of greatness both in the object of his affections and in the man who could feel them.' [1]

2. There is the statement of fact—'the affliction of Joseph.' The rich and powerful men of the land were enjoying themselves. They had every comfort and pleasure and luxury. They knew nothing, because they cared nothing, about the poverty and misery, sorrow and shame of their fellow-countrymen. Many of these miseries were due to the sins of these great men in Israel, and yet they were utterly indifferent to the consequences of their own conduct.

Surely to-day we may speak regarding our own land, and regarding mankind generally, of the affliction of Joseph. It is more pleasant to look only on the bright sunshine, and never seek the dark shadow. It is said that those who reflect least upon the mystery of life are the happiest, and it is probably true—that is, apart from faith in Divine revelation. Nevertheless, we feel that it is better to know with the knowledge that is pain than not to know at all, better to behold life dressed in its mourning garments than to be ignorant that it possesses them. If we only open our eyes, if we only have our ears unstopped, if our hearts are only quickened in sympathy, we shall very soon discover the affliction of our nation, and of mankind. There is no time to speak of all the shadows, sorrows, and shames that belong to our life as a people. One that is ever before the public is intemperance. We remind ourselves of the misery and cruelty inflicted upon children by the self-indulgence of their parents, the 'black' stain upon our life. And yet what we hear most emphasized is the interests of the shareholders and the danger of smaller profits. But is that the direction in which the Christian mind turns? No. We must put on one side the interests of a trade, and on the other side the interests of childhood. The Christian conscience must decide which alone should claim our sympathy. And this is only one of our social evils, and this is only one of the many consequences of this social evil.

But we are not to confine ourselves to our homeland only. We thought that slavery had been abolished in the Empire. But Lady Simon has disillusioned us. And there are the evils of exploitation, of overcrowding, of underpaying, which are causing such moral, physical, and spiritual ruin to the families throughout the East.

¶ 'The vast majority of Chinese children,' says the Labour Commission, 'are made to start work at the earliest possible age,' and it adds that 'the industrial conditions promote tuberculosis among children; that many children were seen at work who could not be more than six years old, and that the hours of work were generally twelve, with one hour for a meal; that many children were virtually sold into industry, and lived under conditions amounting to slavery.'[1]

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[1] *Letters of James Russell Lowell*, ii. 497.

As some one says—'To the uncontrolled profit-motive human beings are simply fodder.' Is that an affliction about which we need not trouble ourselves? Let us remember that the bodies that are bruised are sacred, because the Word Himself became flesh. Let us remember that the hearts that are broken are precious to the Father of all, for He loves all His children with an eternal and infinite affection. There is a shadow on God's throne; there is sorrow in the hearts of angels for the wrong, and misery, and shame of the nations.

3. There is the fault that is here charged—'they are not grieved.'

The prophet is not speaking here of the guilt of these rich men, although many of the miseries and hardships he witnessed were due to the wrongs inflicted by them. What he lays emphasis on is their indifference—they are not grieved. Granted even that we have ourselves no direct share in bringing about these social miseries, let us not suppose we can stand apart and aloof, that we need have no concern about them at all. But can we claim to be free altogether of responsibility? We are members of a society that is responsible for many of these evils, and much of the good and gain that come into our own life is due to social and industrial arrangements that have this disastrous consequence. We cannot say that any one of us is entirely free of responsibility for these wrongs, and the miseries and necessities they bring with them. But even if we could say we are not guilty, we are guilty before God's eternal and infinite love if we are not grieved by it.

Many people seem to think the service that Jesus Christ came into the world to render to us was to make us comfortable and happy and secure. But our life is not a life in Jesus Christ, it is not a life of tenderest communion and closest imitation, if it is only a life in the heights and never a life in the depths also. Let us ask ourselves in the name of that love that was heart-broken for us: Is our life so easy, and secure, and comfortable that we are indifferent to the needs, to the cares and sorrows of men and women and children all around us, members of the same Divine family, all precious to the same Father heart? Let us realize that indifference is sin; not to be grieved is guilt; to remain ignorant is to refuse a vision that God Himself would present to us. These wrongs must be righted. These miseries must be relieved, but if we remain indifferent it means that we shut ourselves out from a common interest with God, and it means that, while God is fulfilling His purpose in His world, we are having no share in that fulfilment.

¶ 'There ought to be,' says Tchekov in one of his tales, 'behind the door of every happy and contented man, some one standing with a hammer, continually reminding him with a tap that there are unhappy people. . . . But there is no man with a hammer. The happy man lives at his ease, and trivial daily cares faintly agitate him like the wind in the aspen tree, and all is well.'

¶ 'Reverence for life,' says Dr Schweitzer, 'does not allow me to appropriate my own happiness. At moments I should like to enjoy myself without a care, but it brings before me thoughts of the misery I have seen or surmised. An uncomfortable doctrine prompts in whispered words, "You are happy, therefore you are called on to give up much."'

The apparent indifference of the Christian Church may have very disastrous results for society. The social problem will be solved. The question for the Christian Church is this: Will it be solved in a Christian way, with the Church, or will it be solved without the Church, and so in the way that is not so fully Christian?

God's Plumb-line

Amos vii. 7, 8.—'Thus he shewed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand. And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more.'

Amos is the man of one idea—the doom of Israel—which stares at him from every object he looks at, however innocent. In this case he sees a builder standing beside a wall, with a plumb-line in his hand. The prophet watches the man with curious interest, and with a foreboding at his heart. What is he going to do? He is going to test the straightness of the wall by dropping the plumb alongside it. The plumb will fall straight; the inexorable law of gravitation will guarantee that. But what of the wall? If it does not prove straight when tried by that infallible test, it must be torn down; for there can be no place in the world of sensible men, still less in God's world, for crooked walls. And as he watches with those sadly earnest eyes of his, he begins to see another wall being subjected to the same inexorable test. Jehovah is standing beside the wall that careless Israel has been building, and has dropped His plumb beside it, to see whether it is straight or not. If not, He will tear it down—the whole fabric of their political and religious life. He is not a relentless God. He does not desire the death of a sinner, but rather that he should repent, and live. But He has already given the nation warnings, and they have been spurned. So the great Master-builder, who can tolerate no crooked or shoddy work, resolves that He 'will not pass by them any more'; and lest there should be any doubt as to what this means, Amos explains it in language of startling vividness: 'The high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.' It often helps us to understand the vigour and intrepidity of a prophet's message, if we attempt to translate it into its modern equivalent; and this word is as if a preacher were to say to-day: 'Your ancient cathedrals and your beautiful churches—Canterbury, York, Westminster, St Paul's, and a hundred others—will be laid in ruins, and the dynasty of King George will perish by the sword.'[1]

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[1] E. S. Woods, *A Faith that Works*, 142.

1. The vision of Amos is not in the least out of date. With the fewest possible touches, and in the boldest outline, it sets before us the eternal and essential truth of Advent. 'Behold the Lord stood . . . with a plumb-line in his hand'—the plumb-line of righteousness, of moral rectitude, of uprightness. It is always in His hand. It cannot help being in His hand. It is part of His revelation: part of Himself. As long as God is God there must be judgment, and whatever will not bear the judgment must go. Most of all must the plumb-line be applied to the wall, because it was originally built by the plumb-line. The Kingdom of God is, first of all, 'righteousness.' From the first day that John the Baptist began to preach the Kingdom of Heaven, moral uprightness was made its test and watchword. All its builders used this line carefully, assiduously. If the result was not satisfactory, it was not their fault. And now the plumb-line is in the hand of God. It is not different in His hand from what it was in the hands of His servants. Plumb-lines do not vary. If one line show the wall to be off the perpendicular, you do not send for another line to see what *it* will say. The uprightness demanded by prophets and apostles is demanded of us still. God called the Church into existence that men should show forth His praises and perfections by the uprightness of their lives. If they do not, the very law of their calling judges and condemns them. It is as inevitable as it is simple. You cannot drive God away; you cannot make the plumb-line fall in any direction but straight down; you cannot conceal or deny the fact that by the plumb-line the wall is very much off the straight. What are you to do? What, indeed, except acknowledge the truth, and be afraid, and repent.

God is standing beside certain walls to-day; quite little ones, maybe, quite subordinate, just intended to serve as props and buttresses to the great interests of religion, to the towering edifice of the Church. And these walls are condemned by the same plumb-line in the hand of God. They are hopelessly out of the straight. They are not conformed to the first principles of moral rectitude. No one would have thought that the Lord God would go and visit these walls which made so little show; these irreligious methods, for example, of raising money for religious purposes! But His eyes are in every place, and He cannot tolerate anything that is off the straight in connection with the Holy Temple of His faith and worship.

2. There must be, and there is, judgment of institutions, of societies. But the plumb-line is also applied to individuals, to the life and work of each of us. That is the great lesson of Advent. It is not the judgment of the last day, far away in the dim and distant future; it is the judgment of to-day which chiefly and directly concerns us. We would not for a moment deny

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[1] J. E. M'Fadyen, *A Cry for Justice*, 95.

or disparage that Last Judgment. But it will only sum up and combine and declare before the universe the judgments of to-day. All the time God stands beside the wall which we have been building, with that plumb-line of His in His hand. It is our life, our work, as Christians, as redeemed people, as members of His Kingdom. The first note of the Kingdom is righteousness. How does the wall stand by that line? Is it, or is it not, off the straight, out of the perpendicular? That is the judgment of to-day, as declared by the plumb-line.

In certain schools of religious thought there is a tendency to dwell upon what they call 'the particular Judgment,' by which they mean the one which follows immediately after death. But there is no such Judgment ever alluded to in Scripture. The Judgment of which the sacred writers speak is either that of the Last Day, which shall combine and complete *all* judgment, or else it is that spoken of in the text, which is going on day by day. Every day God stands beside the wall, as in the old vision, with the plumb-line in His hand; and every day He notes the divergence from the straight, and whether that divergence is growing worse. And we may note it too. The plumb-line is ours also. He gave it to us to build by. We often apply it to other walls, in which we are not personally interested. What we are called upon to do is to interest ourselves in the silent but certain verdict of that line as to our own wall.

Search me, O God, my actions try,
And let my life appear,
As seen by Thine all-searching eye,
To mine my ways make clear.

What is it that the epistle for Advent Sunday says to us? 'Owe no man anything.' Well, *do* we owe anything? Have we any debts unpaid? It is unrighteous and unjust not to pay our debts; and if we *cannot* pay them, it was unrighteous and unjust to contract them.

¶ 'His economical maxims,' says Sir George Trevelyan of Lord Macaulay, 'were of the simplest: to treat official and literary gains as capital, and to pay all bills within the twenty-four hours. "I think," he says, "that prompt payment is a moral duty; knowing as I do how painful it is to have such things deferred."'

'Owe no man anything, except to love one another.' That is a debt also, and one which keeps on growing the more we discharge it. Do we love one another as we ought? Do we try to discharge the obligations of a large-hearted charity? Or do we shut ourselves up in a selfish isolation, keeping all the world at arm's length as though we were not 'called in one body'?

¶ To a fellow-passenger in a train, Gairdner suddenly remarked one day that he had 'been praying for him.' It transpired that he had prayed to be able to love the man who should sit opposite to him, and that God would speak to that man. The acquaintance then made and followed up by letter was the beginning of new life for the older man, an Irish manufacturer, who became one of Gairdner's valued friends.

Gairdner was all the while putting *himself* to spiritual fences: How shall I love *there* [*i.e.* in the mission-field] if I walk with my heart like a stone through the streets here?

Let me love every man, woman, and child I meet and be Jesus to them, and see Jesus in them.

Not I, but Christ loveth in me.
Actually loved the waiter at the hotel.[1]

'Let our one unceasing care,' says Maeterlinck, 'be to better the love we offer to our fellows. One cup of this love that is drawn from the spring on the mountains is worth a hundred taken from the stagnant wells of ordinary charity.'

Prophet and Priest

Amos vii. 12.—'Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there.'

Amos was a man of the Judean highlands—a shepherd of Tekoa. His calling must have taken him far afield over a desolate moorland, which, travellers tell us, is not unlike the limestone hills of our own country. On the solitudes of Tekoa he had long been brooding over the wickedness and folly of the people. To a man whose conscience had not been seared by the customs of society, who had never trafficked with the false weights and measures of the city, the facts of experience were seen not only in their naked reality but in their moral significance. This discernment of values is as primary as the observation of facts. The Law of Nature is not the uniformities it discloses but the subordination of all its parts to a moral end. No man is fully equipped for the criticism of life who has not learned to express his apprehension of the holy purpose that inheres in all things, as did the Psalmist who declared, 'The sea is his and he made it.' Such was Amos.

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[1] C. E. Padwick, *Temple Gairdner of Cairo*, 56.

As he was meditating in the wilderness one day he heard a voice—it was the voice of God—which whispered to his heart that he was the man whom God needed and must send to warn them of the coming disaster, which could be turned only by repentance and obedience and regard for the down-trodden. Instantly the shepherd was transformed into a prophet: how, we shall never completely know. But such an experience, mysterious though it be, is to the man who passes through it the most real thing in all the world. The Lord had said, Go, and he went, because he had heard Him, and was possessed by Him, and could not help himself. We may picture, then, this sturdy highland shepherd as he makes his way north laden with the produce of his croft. From his home in Judah he comes into Bethel, the first town over the Samaritan border, to seek, like many another countryman, an outlet for his wares. But, unlike most members of the rustic fraternity, he has motives other than trade which bring him again and again into the busy town. There is a fire in his bones, a voice in his ear, a word on his tongue. The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy.

¶ Two hundred years ago George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, wrote these words in his diary: 'At another time, as I was walking in a field on a First-day morning, the Lord opened unto me that being bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to fit and qualify men to be ministers of Christ, and I wondered at it, because it was the common belief of people. But I saw it clearly, and was satisfied, and admired the goodness of the Lord, who had opened this thing unto me that morning.' Seven hundred years before the birth of Christ a greater than George Fox had learnt the selfsame lesson: 'Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I am no prophet, neither am I one of the sons of the prophets; but I am an herdman and a dresser of sycomore trees: and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.'

1. There is a dramatic scene which sets in a clear light the real nature of the antagonism which his message creates. It is the sharp encounter between Amos, the man of God, and Amaziah, the official representative of the national worship. Sacerdotalism is not confined to the clergy. It may be found in the testy colonel, the doctor jealously professional, the city magnate who describes himself as a plain man of business. But this priest we know well. Centuries of ecclesiastical tradition are gathered up in his person. For him religion has crystallized in the formularies. He never doubts but that Church doctrine is Bible truth. He is a man of affairs, buttonholes persons of importance in the Athenæum, relies upon tact and diplomacy for safeguarding Church interests. The one thing that he is not is a prophet. His ethical code is a somewhat confused set of traditional maxims which work out in practice at about the average morality of the day with a churchly bias. In fact, he is a man about whom there is nothing ultimate, nothing that is really founded upon an impregnable rock; the priest of a drifting society, who for all his strong opinions does not really know where he is. If judgment is to roll down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream, he will be lifted off his feet by the raging torrent. In the interests of social stability and good government fanaticism must be restrained.

This is the person who confronts the strange preacher, whose fame has by this time reached the ears of the superior classes, as he is in the midst of one of his most impassioned utterances. He is telling the people how he has seen the vision of a plumb-line. Judgment was about to begin at the house of God. 'The high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.' Was this, then, a conspiracy against the government? Was rebellion, perhaps even regicide, to be openly preached within a stone's throw of the priest's West Front? This cannot be allowed to pass. Fuming with indignation, the outraged dignitary pushes his way through the crowd. 'How now, sir!

What is this you are saying? We all know you are a paid agitator! Go back to Judah and prophesy there. "But prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a royal house."'

¶ It is noteworthy that what the privileged religious orders were doing in the time of Amos they have always been doing more or less. Once get a thing called venerable, and recognized as such, and before long you have all the forces of mammon sheltering behind it. Not that its advocates and representatives are conscious hypocrites, but when the stability of the institution becomes identical with their own self-interest it is but natural that they should defend the latter by safeguarding the former. Privilege has always been doing this, and again and again the Spirit of God has had to destroy the sham to recover the reality. Thus in the thirteenth century the long struggle of the Empire and the Papacy ended in the triumph of the latter. The Pope sat on the throne of St Peter wearing his triple diadem and holding aloft the sceptre of universal dominion, saying: 'I am Cæsar; I am emperor.' This was done in the name of Christ, and yet it was the very opposite of the spirit of Christ. The arrogance and cupidity of the priestly order were conjoined to a corruption of manners which has never been excelled; and yet every simple soul in Christendom believed that, although individual Popes might be wicked, the system itself was somehow sacred. It was only here and there that some clear-sighted man dared to question this assumption, but whenever he did so it was at the peril of his life. No more appalling chapter of human suffering has ever been written than that of the tortures inflicted upon the Alpine peasants who tried to read a higher meaning into the word 'good' than that which was implied in the practice of the Catholic Church as represented by her official heads. Note how rare it is that a reformer ever comes forth from the ranks of privilege in Church or State. Your Amos may come from the plough; it is but seldom that he comes from a conventional school of the prophets.[1]

2. So for the excited priest. 'Then answered Amos.' In all his native simplicity he faces the greatest churchman of his day without flinching and without fear. He is no professional prophet. He is a simple, straightforward, honest man, with a mighty grip on the ultimate realities, and with a gift of plain, biting speech like Latimer or Spurgeon. The cultured might call him vulgar, but it would be their lack of appreciation if they did. Full well he knows that his words are no damnatory outburst, but simply a premonition, an integral part of that judgment which will accomplish itself in facts stern and bitter. He does not disguise his speech. The victory of a foreign foe in those times had grim consequences. So Amos turns upon the fuming priest before him. What is this fools' paradise in which you and all your kind are living? The captivity will come, and 'thy wife shall be a harlot in the city.'

What Amos saw in the rich and prosperous society of Samaria was the direct antithesis between its blindness to the ultimate realities and his own communion with the righteous God. He saw the social wreckage with which the path of an apparently prosperous community was strewn—the needy who were sold for silver, the victims of a tolerated lust, the neglected obligations of a forgotten brotherhood. He saw a religion that spent itself in the discharge of the customary punctilios of ritual and sacrifice, its priests resenting the suggestion that the scrupulous performance of public worship may become a substitute for the fulfilment of righteousness. And what his experience—gained in the secret places of his own soul amid the solitudes of Nature—had taught him was this: these things were not, as men might carelessly and conveniently suppose, the unavoidable by-product of human progress, to be tolerated as results for which there was ample compensation in the general well-being of the nation. On the contrary, they were open and flagrant violations of the only thing that is unavoidable—the eternal law which God has imposed upon His children, and which He will exact of the most favoured nation with the most inexorable rigour.

It may be at once conceded that Amos is a man of one idea, and that much more than the testimony of his stern and solitary spirit is required if prophecy is to correspond to the manifold needs of the human heart. To remind men of the grinding of the mills of God is not to save their souls. Justice must blossom into love, and the passion for righteousness dissolve in a flood of tenderness, before the message of the living God has been delivered in all its redemptive fullness to the sons and daughters of a wayward race. It is indeed the splendid prerogative of our God to turn the hard rock into a standing water, the flint stone into a springing well. But though He is wounded for our transgressions, though the mountain is cleft for a hiding-place, the Eternal is still the Righteous One, and the Rock stands sure. The words of Amos are not the whole counsel of God. The tidings that he brings must be supplemented by Hosea, by Micah, by the royal Isaiah, by the evangelical prophet, by the Christ Himself. But the soul of Amos reposes on the ultimate truth of the universe. The end, as it is the beginning, of history is the establishment in the earth of that righteousness which is the habitation of God's seat. That is the one truth that is both primary and final for the community to which we belong, and, for our own lives also.

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[1] R. J. Campbell.

3. This is the truth which it needs no traditional priesthood to guard, no professional prophet to proclaim. The open ear and the quick conscience alone are required to grasp it. Amaziah will always seek to silence Amos. Priest and man face each other—priest with king behind, man with God—and wage that debate in which the whole warfare and progress of religion consist. It is, in its extreme form, the contrast between a religion of externals and a religion of the heart, between ceremony and morality, between tradition and progress, between bondage and liberty, between the God who in ancient times has expressed Himself once for all, and the living God of To-day and To-morrow—that is the conflict incarnate in the persons of Amaziah and Amos. We cannot forget that Jesus of Nazareth was a *prophet* mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how it was the chief *priests* who delivered Him up to be crucified.

But there are hierarchies of commerce, of science, of statecraft, no less than of religion, the members of which are too often ready to make the Word of God of none effect by their traditions. Let not the preacher of righteousness disturb men's peace of mind or contribute to the world's unrest. Let him prophesy in the backwoods where he can do no harm, not amidst the complexities of great communities, which depend for their stable equilibrium upon facts of which he knows nothing—the principles of political economy, the laws of Nature, the secrets of diplomacy, the authority of the Church. To all of these the prophet's answer is the same, *Fiat Justitia, ruat caelum*—a paradox but not a lie. And to those who refuse to hear the prophet God speaks in the judgments of history. To the man of business, 'Ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them.' To the man of science, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not My Word.' To the publicist, 'Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth.' To the churchman, 'I will remove thy candlestick out of its place.' And to all: 'Let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream'; 'Seek the Lord, and ye shall live.'

THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Obadiah is one of the least known of the prophetical books, not merely because it is the shortest in the Old Testament, but because it has no textual gems and apparently little in the way of a spiritual message. Yet it is a vivid and powerful piece of work which will repay study, a mine from which treasure may be dug.

I

A Family Feud

The book is to be understood against the background of an ancient family feud. Edom and Israel had a near kinship of blood, but a profound antipathy of spirit. It went back to the days when Esau, the profane man, and Jacob, the man of faith, though twin brothers, could not find it possible to live in harmony. The descendants of Esau made their home among the rocky fastnesses of Edom to the south-east of the Dead Sea. When the Israelites came out of Egypt they begged leave to pass through Edom. On this request being refused by the Edomites, Moses respected the blood kinship and led Israel round their territory on the east side, leaving them unmolested.

After Israel settled in Canaan, however, there seems to have followed a state of chronic warfare with Edom. Probably the material bone of contention was the control of the trade routes to the south, but doubtless there was a deep antagonism of spirit between the two peoples, the religious pretentions of the one being particularly obnoxious to the clever, self-confident character of the other. Saul warred against Edom, David overran the country, and his general, Joab, seems to have attempted its utter destruction by a massacre. There follows a tale of ever-recurrent revolts, invasions, and reprisals. Yet the sense of kinship seems never to have been lost. For, when the brutal power of Assyria threatened all with a common overthrow, it was felt that tribal feuds should be forgotten and all should present a united front to the enemy. Some local confederacies were formed, but the enmity of Edom was implacable. So when Jerusalem fell they were in at the death, savagely exultant. When the brutal warriors of Babylon, in the heat of their work of destruction, were throwing down the walls of Zion and dashing out the brains of babies on the stones, the Edomites were shouting, ‘ Down with it, down with it, to the ground ’ (Ps. cxxxvii. 7).

This foul deed made the bitterest drop in the cup of Israel’s captivity, and inspired many a curse on Edom and many a prayer for vengeance. It is against Edom that the only imprecation in the Book of Lamentations is hurled : ‘ Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, the cup also shall pass through unto thee ’ (iv. 21, 22). Ezekiel utters prophecies of inextinguishable wrath. When all wars are over and the whole earth rejoices, Edom shall still be desolate (Ezek. xxv. 12–14, xxxv. 14). Even the great evangelical prophet of the Restoration turns aside to paint a dreadful picture of the Saviour returning from the destruction of Edom with all his garments splashed with blood. Without that it was felt that Israel’s triumph would not be complete.

II

The Prophet and His Book

Edom is the sole theme of Obadiah’s book. It is a passionate recital of deep injuries done to the people of God, followed by fierce denunciations of Divine vengeance on the wrongdoer. Of the prophet himself we know nothing, not even the age in which he lived. Indeed his name, which means ‘ servant of Jehovah,’ might possibly be the designation of some prophet whose proper name is lost. His book, small as it is, raises some critical questions of interest, especially its relation to the Book of Jeremiah. Obadiah vv. 1–9 bears the closest resemblance to Jer. xlix. 7–22, some of the verses being practically identical. It is evident that either Jeremiah borrowed from Obadiah or Obadiah from Jeremiah, or that both borrowed from a common source. All three views have been upheld, and no certain conclusion is attainable.

Perhaps the most probable view is that both Jeremiah and Obadiah reaffirmed some older prophecy which denounced the pride of Edom and foretold its fall. Considering the length and bitterness of the feud, it is easy to believe that such denunciations were uttered from time to time, and once uttered were remembered. This first section of the book, therefore, may have originated at some period prior to the Exile, but it seems impossible to maintain, as some have done, that the whole book is pre-exilic. The main section seems unmistakably to describe the fall of Jerusalem. We may take it, then, that the prophet lived in the time of the Exile. It has been suggested that he lived after the Return, because 'there is no prediction of the rebuilding and re-populating of Jerusalem.' This seems precarious reasoning. On the contrary, it should be noted that the description of the Edomites' behaviour at the fall of Jerusalem is so vivid, and given in such detail, as to suggest an eye-witness. At least the impression given is of events still recent and of wounds still bleeding.

The substance of the prophet's indictment is that Edom, a blood-brother, stood by while strangers and foreigners made havoc of Jerusalem. Nay, more, he gloated on it, he exulted over his brother in the day of his misfortune, he laughed aloud at the horrors and atrocities of the siege. The verb (verse 12) translated in A.V. as 'spoken proudly' means literally 'made the mouth large,' that is, with laughter. The reference is to the loud guffaws of brutal laughter with which the Edomites greeted the destruction of the city and the slaughter of the people. They went further. They took their share in the plunder, they posted themselves where they could cut off the fugitives, they betrayed them to the enemy. All this, the prophet declares, will return upon their own heads. The fastnesses of Edom shall be searched out and gleaned till nothing is left. Edom will be quite swallowed up. It will be as straw upon which Israel will fall like a devouring fire till it is utterly consumed. Saviours will come to Mount Zion, and the kingdom shall be the Lord's, but Edom shall be wiped out. Not a hope of mercy, not a quiver of relenting!

Such is the spirit and message of the prophet Obadiah. It may raise the question, Why do such merciless imprecations find a place in the Bible? It might, of course, be answered in general that here we are dealing with the Old Testament, in which there is much that falls below the spirit of Christ. But doubtless there are other reasons besides. Two may be here suggested. The first is that the Bible voices all the varying moods and passions of the human heart. Doubts about the moral government of God find utterance in the Book of Job, the sense of the weariness of life is expressed in Ecclesiastes, all human griefs and fears, down to the deepest notes of despair, resound through the Psalms. So there is also found a place for the wild bitter cry of the oppressed, even when the agonies of their torture have made them savage. No more convincing proof could be given that all these bitter cries reach the ear of God, and that every human plaint finds in heaven a sympathetic hearing.

The other point is that these records help us to realize how it *feels*. Our imaginations are naturally sluggish and our sympathies narrow. When things go well with us we take but a languid interest in the conditions of our less fortunate brothers. As Jeanie Deans said to the Queen, when pleading for her sister's life, 'It's not when we sleep saft and wake merrily ourselves that we think on other people's sufferings.'[1] The man who has steady work and is comfortably housed easily forgets the miseries of the unemployed and the homeless. So in times of settled peace we have but the dimmest sense of the horrors of war, of the sacking of towns, of persecutions and tortures. Try to picture for a moment the blazing city, the blood-stained streets, the desecrated homes, the babes torn from their mothers' arms to be dashed on the pavement, and the mind recoils with horror from the picture. What agony must they have felt who actually endured it! Their cries come to us across the ages, sharp and bitter, to touch our hearts with tender pity to all who are oppressed, and to stir within us a holy resolve that by God's help oppression of every sort shall cease and brotherhood shall reign.

III

The Profane Spirit

Obadiah's book may legitimately be taken as a study of the profane spirit. Edom's inveterate feud with Israel has a profound spiritual significance. When we sing that 'Zion in her anguish, with Babylon must cope,' we refer to the age-long antagonism of the Church and the world. So Esau is the type of the profane man in conflict with Jacob, the man of faith. All the prophets believed, and history has declared that they were right in believing, that Israel, with all its faults, carried the fortunes of the Kingdom of God. Edom, on the contrary, exemplifies the profane spirit, which, though it may be clever and worldly wise, lives only for the present, counts material things the only real, and therefore is for ever hostile to the people of God. This is a spirit common enough in our time, and it is of interest to note the marks of the profane spirit as it revealed itself in the prophet's day.

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[1] *Heart of Midlothian*, chap. xxxvii.

1. *Indifference.*—The Edomites stood aloof and left their kinsmen of Israel to fight alone. Zion might fall, but what did they care. God's cause was no concern of theirs. The prophet points out that this really meant siding with the enemy. 'Thou wast as one of them.' So it is always. Has not our Lord Himself said, 'He that is not with me is against me.' There are many disputes and quarrels towards which it is possible, and perhaps right, to maintain an attitude of neutrality, but in the conflict between good and evil neutrality is impossible and indifference merits the severest condemnation. 'Curse ye, Meroz,' said the angel of the Lord, 'curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.' Ours also is a day of conflict, when forces of evil are rampant and threatening, when God's cause needs the help of every man of goodwill. Let no one think he will be blameless if he stand aloof. He will justly be counted among Christ's enemies, among those accursed ones who in the great day are condemned for what they failed to do.

2. *Injury.*—Indifference easily becomes hostility. Edom actively aided the enemy and dealt some dastardly blows at suffering Israel. When the defences were broken down they went plundering among the ruins, they cut off the fugitives, they betrayed them to the foe. These are but samples of the treatment which the profane man has ever been ready to mete out to the people of God. How long and dreadful is the tale of the injuries and persecutions which the Church has endured at the hands of those who seemed to feel that its very presence in the world was intolerable. Nor is this spirit yet dead. One cannot go far without encountering evidences of a desire to injure the cause of God, to belittle the work of the Church and cripple her influence for good. Without doubt this spirit animates many of the attacks made on the work of the Church abroad. This is laid hold on as a vulnerable point, where attack is easy and defence difficult, where sweeping criticisms can be made without fear of contradiction; but the underlying impulse is often a desire to injure the Christian cause. Lacking the courage and resource to assail the main defences of Zion these treacherous Edomites are fain to attack some weak and distant outpost.

3. *Insult.*—This is, perhaps, the most characteristic mark of the profane spirit. The Edomites crowned injury with insult. Their roars of ribald laughter mingled with the shrieks of women and the groans of the dying. This was the most cruel wound of all, the hardest to forgive and forget. It has ever been the delight of the profane man to treat things sacred with mockery and contempt. How often in the Psalms do we hear bitter complaints about those who 'shoot out the tongue,' who say 'aha!'—Philistines who make sport of Samson when his strength is gone. 'Reproach hath broken my heart,' cries one, while another says, 'Our soul is exceedingly filled with contempt.' This is that 'reproach of Christ,' which the Apostle says Moses endured in Egypt, and which is the portion of God's true people while they dwell in an evil world. 'The wave of suffering and reproach that rose far back, even at the other side of the sea of time, and rolled ever in towards the shore, went, as it rose, over the people of God in Egypt; it broke in its height over Christ Himself; and believers since then are still struggling in its broken waters.'[1] So they are. The profane man is as ready as ever to sneer at the highest, to extinguish noble impulses with coarse laughter, and to behold with malicious glee the downfall of the good.

Such are the marks of the profane spirit, and it is in the teeth of this that the man of God is called on to maintain his faith. Let us not fail to observe that the prophet Obadiah was one who kept the faith, a singularly heroic faith, when all things are considered. Zion had fallen; the cause of God seemed hopelessly lost. There was no least gleam of light on the horizon. Then it was that the prophet lifted up his voice from the ruins, and made the strong assertion, 'Wrongs will be righted; saviours will come to Zion; the kingdom shall be the Lord's.' A brave word, for so dark a night! Thank God, our prospects are brighter and our Christian faith more assured. The Saviour has come, and the kingdom shall be His, for 'He must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet.' This is the faith which, like the prophet, we must fearlessly assert, and which we must make our strong support in face of the world's opposition and indifference and contempt.

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[1] A. B. Davidson, *Hebrews*, 228.

J. H. Morrison

The Sin of Neutrality

Obad. 11.—'In the day that thou stoodest on the other side.'

It is perhaps impossible to tell what are the precise events here spoken of. This little book, as one has said, has been tossed from century to century of Jewish history. All we can be certain of is that Jerusalem had been captured; its enemies had assailed it, and it had fallen. And in the hour of that assault Edom did nothing; it stood as an onlooker on the other side. Edom was not a distant country—it lay just across the Jordan to the south. Edom was not a land of foreigners—the Edomites were the children of Esau, Jacob's brother. Yet in the day of Judah's direst need, when her enemies were thundering at her gates, Edom was content to be an onlooker. That is what stirs to hot anger the heart of Obadiah, as he recalls the hour when Jerusalem was devastated. It is that a brother-nation should never have raised a finger to help their hard-pressed brothers in their need. So Edom is cursed for being a looker-on—for playing no part in the drama at its gates—for assuming the attitude of culpable neutrality.

1. The Bible does not encourage interference. It does not incite men to rush into every quarrel. 'Man, who made *me* a judge or divider over you?' was the answer of Jesus once to two disputing brothers. But this was far more than a quarrel between parties. It was a phase of the unceasing battle between light and darkness. Jerusalem was God's city—she stood for the cause of God—and it was against God that her besieging foes were fighting. Had it been a mere quarrel between two jealous states Edom had been well advised to take no part in it. She had her fields to till, and she had her vines to cultivate; it would have been folly to interfere. But this to the prophet was not a strife of party. It was right against wrong; it was goodness against evil; and it was because in that conflict Edom took no part that Obadiah launched God's curse on her.

In the Book of Judges we find this incident: Deborah and Barak had gained a noble victory over the Canaanites under their captain Sisera. It was a gallant and hazardous attempt, and men had taken their lives into their hands to dare it. But there was one little highland village, lying asleep in the shelter of the hills, that sent no men to the muster. They thought they would never be missed, so insignificant were they. Besides, they were safe themselves. And what business was it of theirs? But 'Curse ye, Meroz,' saith the angel of the Lord, 'because it came not to the help of the Lord against the mighty.' God will accept many an excuse for honest error; but God will accept no excuse for being neutral. So Meroz has perished—no man knows its site—it has been cast by the arm of heaven into oblivion—and all because, like Edom, in the hour of trial it stood aloof and played the looker-on.

¶ When truth is in danger, the conduct of many is to wash their hands in Pilate's basin of weak neutrality, but they only soil the water and do not cleanse their hands.[1]

¶ The following passage occurs in the letter which Erasmus wrote to Campegio in 1520 to excuse himself from taking part in the conflict of the Reformation: 'The corruptions of the Roman Court may require reform extensive and immediate, but I and the like of me are not called on to take a work like that upon ourselves. I would rather see things left as they are than witness a revolution which may lead to one knows not what. Others may be martyrs if they like. I aspire to no such honour.'

It is always difficult to analyse the attitude of the present-day Edomite, and to discover the factors of his indifference to the cause of God in the world. Yet it is at least safe to say that one potent reason for his condemnation is his absorption in concerns which have little, if any, relation to his first obligation. In the main he stands 'on the other side' because, despite his Church membership and his mental assent to the truths and implicates of the gospel, his heart is on the other side. He is, for instance, far more concerned in the rise and fall of markets than in the progress of the Kingdom of God. The one to him is at least real, while the other is visionary and of little consequence. His controlling ideals of good are connected with material acquisitions. Nor does he intend for a moment that his personal interests should be jeopardized by participation in moral struggles.

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[1] John Ker.

The mere idea of sacrificing 'things on the earth' for 'the things that are above' appeals to him only as the quixotism of a fanatic, to be tolerated but never emulated. Enthusiasms in regard to business, politics, sport, or social advancement he can well understand. Of these, indeed, he is always capable. But a spiritual interpretation of life he deems folly. His mind has become utterly confused as to true values by reason of his obsession regarding the worth of the so-called good things of this life. Selfishness has stealthily grown upon him, until now he has become practically incapable of response to the claims of humanity and of God. So he stands 'on the other side,' even when the Trumpet of God sounds through the land, thrilling every true heart with the prospect of battle and victory under Him they love.

Upon such moral and spiritual lukewarmness, which has nothing whatever in common with true discipleship, the ascended Christ has declared unfailing judgment. The reprobation and end of Laodicean and Edomite alike is never a matter of uncertainty. Those who stand 'on the other side' in the day of urgent necessity are, by every law of God and right, determining their own destiny on the other side of the great fixed gulf. Their portion is with the enemies of the Cross of Christ.

¶ Dante in his famous delineation of the after-life scarcely knows what to do with the neutrals, but he solves the difficulty thus. He depicts them as occupying the mouth of hell. There they swirl incessantly in clouds of red sand, their faces bitten by wasps and hornets. There they pursue, in a blind faltering way, a flag which never stays for a moment in one place. And this is how Dante explains their fate, 'Heaven will not have them, and the deep hell receives them not, lest the wicked there should imagine that there were souls worse than themselves, and have some glory over them.'[1]

¶ 'The old war-horse was out to-day,' I used to say when the Dean had shaken his head with an upward look of grave defiance, as at some threatening onset that he foresaw bearing down. The war-horse! Yes! That was again and again the picture that rose in my mind as the slight figure drew itself together, and the eyes flashed. There would be no flinching in him when the trumpet began to blow: that was clear, as his mouth grew stern. After all, behind all the smiling veils, this world (one felt) is an arena in which the battle of the Lord goes forward. We shall not get through without a tussle, a fierce bout. Evil is strong, and may come in like a flood: and in the great day of Armageddon he at least would not be found unready or unarmed.[2]

2. The peril, however, of the 'other side' attitude toward life is not only that of ultimate retribution, but that of present deterioration also. For it puts men hopelessly out of touch with reality. To be altogether concerned about one's own ease and well-being, even when a religious meaning is given to these terms, is to fail both of understanding and of realization in regard to the true purpose of life. We are members one of another. It has pleased God to make the human family a solidarity. No man can live unto himself except by forfeiture of his birthright. The world which such men create for themselves, and into which nothing of disturbance with their own interests is permitted to intrude, may be comfortable and pleasant. But it is not the real world; and sooner or later those who have shaded their eyes from life's insistent facts, and turned their ears from its clamant calls, become positively blind and deaf. Anyone who habitually stands 'on the other side' in regard to the Lord's conflicts inevitably loses the power of seeing what is happening across the road, or of hearing the voice of need which summons others to service. Henceforth for him life has shrunken to the dimensions of his own outraged capacities. He

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[1] D. C. Mitchell, *The Nonsense of Neutrality*, 165.

[2] *Life and Letters of Dean Church*, 226.

bears in himself the penalty of his calculated indifference.

3. It follows that such an one, by his studied avoidance of obligation, makes anything like fellowship with God impossible. For God Himself is unceasing activity in presence of human sin and need. The Epicureans of the old world pictured the gods as utterly indifferent. They thought that they feasted and loved and lived for ever in an unruffled and ungodly ease. No echo of human sorrow ever reached them. No cry of a breaking heart ever distressed them. The shouting of voices in the world's dim struggle never flecked the sunshine of elysium. We cannot wonder that a neutral heaven like that fostered in the citizens of Rome a neutral character. But our God is not like that, the God whom we have revealed in Jesus Christ. The whole record of the gospel is this—that, when the world rushed headlong to destruction in wilful sin, He did not stand on the other side a passive spectator of the tragedy. He saw, and pitied, and came to the rescue—in His Son. Nor during those redeeming years of His earthly life did He ever stand on the other side, remote from human affliction and sorrow. In all points He was tempted as all men are tempted. He acquainted Himself with grief and loneliness, and suffered the varied experiences of the common lot. And the supreme expression and pledge of His close kinship with those who suffer and strive is the Cross. Such an Evangel as Calvary proclaims—a call to life-giving and life-sharing union with Him—has literally no meaning for the man who is content to stand on the other side except as the measure of his opportunity and of his condemnation.

Possessing our Possessions

Obad. 17.—'The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.'

How much of the inheritance of the individual Christian and of the Christian Church is yet unclaimed or unrealized! As the Israelites failed to conquer the land upon which they entered, or to retrieve it when lost, so, for various reasons, the spiritual Israel fails to actualize its possessions. Most of us as yet hold only a green border of the inheritance which is our Lord's bequest.

1. The first thing in life is surely that we possess ourselves, no other proprietorship being of much account until this is established. We sometimes complain that many persons are so aggressive that we 'cannot call our soul our own.' It is quite possible that it is not our own, whatever it may be called. We allow society to filch it away, to occupy it, and the primary right of manhood is in abeyance. A modern writer thus laments this alienation: 'It is tragic how few people ever "possess their soul" before they die. Most people are other people. Their thoughts are some one else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.' '*My* soul' carries with it the conviction of my talent, calling, responsibility; and until we truly possess our soul in the sense of personal ability, judgment, and service, we are poor indeed, whatever our conventional rank or reputation. The fact, the burden, and the glory of personality are realized as we recognize our relation to God, our dependence upon Him, and our ultimate accountability to Him. Then no socialistic swarm can stifle within us that saving inherent sense of individual being which is the source of dignity, conscience, and power. In fellowship with God we seize ourselves; we more and more realize the splendid property implied in a living soul.

2. How much remains to be claimed and appropriated in Christian doctrine! Take the Apostles' Creed; whilst in one sense we believe it, in another and deeper sense we have never possessed our possession. How Dr Dale came to publish *The Living Christ* is well known. He was writing an Easter sermon; and when halfway through, the thought of the risen Lord broke in upon Him as it had never done before. '"Christ is alive," I said to myself; "alive!" and then I paused; "alive!" and then I paused again; "alive! Can that really be true? Living as really as I myself am?" I got up and walked about, repeating "Christ is living! Christ is living!" At first it seemed strange and hardly true, but at last it came upon me as a burst of sudden glory: "Yes, Christ is living." It was to me a new discovery. I thought that all along I had believed it; but not until that moment did I feel sure about it.' May we not take each article of the Creed and feel that we hold it pretty much as Dale held the article of the Resurrection before

this awakening? The doctrines of the Divine Fatherhood, the redeeming Son, and the Holy Ghost, of forgiveness, sanctification, resurrection, judgment, and eternal life are not possessed by us because they do not possess us. How rarely we persist to get hold of the cardinal facts as Dale did in that privileged moment! Acquiescing in the article of faith, and retaining the name of the great truth it expresses, tends to keep us out of the reality. We need to take our Bible afresh and ask ourselves how far we have actually entered upon this inexhaustible world of truth, privilege, and promise. Most of us know only its fringe. We must become more earnest students of the sacred page; if we are to possess the gold, we must first be prospectors. We must study it more in an attitude of sympathetic expectation and desire. We must habitually ponder its sayings in our heart. Every time we recite the Creed, or chant the *Te Deum*, let us attack it by personal thought, sympathy, and appropriating faith.

By the sanctification of the common experiences of practical life we enter into possession of the truth. If the creeds explain life, life no less interprets the creeds. A striking testimony on this subject is given in a letter addressed by William Davies to Professor William Knight. 'An illness like mine reveals many things to the soul. One is the vast difference between theoretic or unpractised religion and philosophy and experimental. My conclusion is that we learn nothing from theory, and that is the reason why life is so hard a school. Everything of value to us must be *a suffered experience*; otherwise, little or nothing is acquired. All evolution is through suffering, and there is no other mode of advancement and progress. That is my discovery.' The young Christian recites the catechism which defines the true riches, and the young preacher in the systematic theology which he has so thoroughly mastered has an excellent catalogue of spiritual treasure; but it will take years of duty and difficulty, of joy and sorrow, to convert the 'phantom millions' into the sterling gold of positive knowledge and assurance. Let this, then, reconcile us to the hard school of life; here, and only here, can the abstract, shadowy truth prove itself as solid as the rock and precious beyond all imagination. The stress of circumstance, the conflicts with temptation, the burden s of duty, the pangs of illness, loss, and bereavement, are bringing heavenly teachings and promises out of the clouds and making them 'our very own.'

3. Everywhere in the New Testament Christian character and experience are represented as exceedingly broad and rich beyond compare, yet few explore the lengths and breadths of the good land. Could any contrast be sharper, and in many respects sadder, than that which obtains between the spiritual affluence of the ideal believer of the Epistles and the actual poverty of spirit and character of the average modern Christian?

¶ The story is told of a man who possessed a large estate in the northern part of England, and who found himself embarrassed by his possessions. The outgoings were so much greater than the incomings from his estate that he died a poor man. His possessions were bequeathed to his oldest son, who it happened soon afterward brought home with him from college a friend who was a mineralogist. As they walked over the estate, the trained eye of this mineralogist detected what appeared to be an out-cropping of coal, and he turned to the young inheritor with the announcement, 'I believe you have got coal here.' Further investigations were made, with the result that they found one of the richest seams of coal in England, and the young man is to-day the head of one of the richest families in our land. The point is this: His father possessed all that coal, and yet died almost a bankrupt. He possessed that coal just as much as the young man came to possess it, and yet in another sense he did not possess a single ounce of it. How many Christians are just like that man!

The thoughtful reader of the letters of St Paul, St Peter, or St John must often feel that they contain hundreds of glowing passages expressive of spiritual sentiment and promise, any one of which, fully realized, would immeasurably enrich and beautify our character. St Paul is fond of speaking of 'the earnest of the spirit'; and it is only so far that we have gone in faith, experience, and character. To the end of this life it can only be that we know 'the earnest' of the promise; but may we not know far more of it than we do? How constantly does Charles Wesley incite us to inherit our inheritance!

Rejoicing now in earnest hope,
I stand, and from the mountain-top
See all the land below;
Rivers of milk and honey rise,
And all the fruits of paradise
In endless plenty grow.

Oh, that I might at once go up!
No more on this side Jordan stop,
But now the land possess;
This moment end my legal years,
Sorrows, and sins, and doubts, and fears,
A howling wilderness.

4. There is a final direction in which we must vindicate our right—the reclamation of the world for Christ. Before He left us our Master gave His Church the title-deeds of the whole earth, and instructed us to claim it for Him. He who has redeemed the world waits to take possession. 'But upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.' Through the power and beauty of holy teaching, holy lives, and holy sacrifices shall Christ get His own, and rule the nations as their rightful Lord.

THE BOOK OF JONAH

INTRODUCTION

I

Date and Character of the Book

The Book of Jonah differs materially from the rest of the prophetic literature. It contains no direct prophetic word, but tells the story of a prophet's mission and its results in much the same style as the Elijah and Elisha sections of Kings. The hero of the book is Jonah, the son of Amittai, a prophet of Gath-hepher, in Zebulon, usually identified with El Meshed, a village of Galilee, three miles north-east of Nazareth, where tradition places his tomb. According to 2 Kings xiv. 25, the only historical record of the prophet's activity, he flourished in the early part of the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (about 775 B.C.), and predicted that king's victories over the Syrians. Jonah was thus an older contemporary of Amos and Hosea. The Book of Jonah, however, is centuries later. The story is told as one of a long past age. Nineveh and its people have already vanished from the scene; the very name of its king is unknown. The earliest possible date for the book would thus be after the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C. But the evidence of diction and style carries us still further down the stream of time. The language is strongly tinctured with Aramaisms and other words and idioms belonging to the post-exilic literature. In the use of phrases like 'the God of heaven' (i. 9) the book shows affinity with those of Ezra and Nehemiah. While the style is based on classical models, it is occasionally forced and awkward, reminding us of the stiff-jointed workmanship of such late books as Esther and Daniel rather than the easy flow of the earlier historians. The book, too, betrays clear marks of dependence, not only on 1 and 2 Kings, but also on Jer. xviii. 11, xxvi. 3 (*cf.* Jon. iii. 8), and even on Joel ii. 13, 14 (*cf.* Jon. iii. 9, iv. 2.). The date will thus fall somewhere in the third century B.C., not long before the closing of the Prophetic Canon about the end of that century.

The lapse of time between event and record is sufficient proof that we are dealing, not with authentic history, but with late constructive romance. The artistic quality of the book itself bears out this conclusion. Apart from the strain that a number of its incidents put on the faith of its readers—the sudden rising and falling of the storm, the wholesale conversion of the Ninevites, the swift growth and equally swift decay of the gourd, and especially the episode of the 'great fish'—the book passes over details which a sound historical sense could not fail to supply. Thus it gives no hint as to where Jonah landed, how he made his way to Nineveh, in what language he addressed the people, and what was the result on his own character. The story breaks off abruptly with God's appeal to his better nature. From the dramatic point of view, such a close to the book is impressive in the extreme; from the historical, it is unsatisfying to an equal degree. The fact, of course, is that the writer was far more concerned with the dramatic effect than with the historical. The book is really a fine example of the Midrash, or imaginative tale, which the later Jewish teachers used so freely in the imparting of spiritual truth. As literature, it stands in the same category as the books of Ruth and Esther, the narrative parts of Daniel, and in the New Testament the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. At one or two points it even passes the borderland from parable to allegory. Jonah is not just the ordinary kind of dramatic hero, but a type of the Israelite of his day, with all his spiritual pride and spiritual insularity. The analogy of Jer. li. 34, 44, where Babylon is likened to a sea-monster which has swallowed up Israel, and then is compelled to cast her out of his maw, would further suggest that Jonah's imprisonment in the fish is an allegorical representation of the Exile, through which Israel came to itself, and in the person of the 'Servant of the Lord' was called to take up its missionary task with new purpose and resolution. Such a view of the book alone does justice to its true character, and is fitted to convey to us a due sense of its momentous message.

II

Unity of the Book

The unity of the book has been challenged by various critics. The boldest attempt to resolve it into constituent sources has been made by Wade in his recent *Westminster Commentary* (1925). Wade's method of analysis, however, is too subtle to carry conviction. The one section that is justly suspected as an intrusion is the Prayer in ii. 2–9, which is really a Hymn of Thanksgiving for some unexpected deliverance from death, in the style of the later Psalmists, and with no essential bearing on Jonah's experience. Whatever the origin of this piece, its proper place is after verse 10. It is possible, too, that iv. 5 should be transposed to follow iii. 4. Other apparent discrepancies in the book can readily be removed by slight textual emendations.

III

Contents of the Book

The book opens with Jehovah's command to Jonah to go to Nineveh, and testify against the wickedness of the city. Fearing, however, lest the people repent, and Jehovah forgive them, Jonah goes down to Joppa, and takes ship for Tarshish, on the distant coast of Spain, hoping in this way to escape from the presence of Jehovah. But Jehovah hurls a great wind upon the sea, and there arises a mighty storm, so that the ship threatens to break up. In their alarm the sailors cry each one to his god; then they throw overboard the cargo, in order to lighten the ship. All this time Jonah is lying fast asleep in the hold. The captain wakes him, rebukes him for his thoughtless slumbers, and bids him call upon his God, who perhaps may bethink Himself of them, and save them from their peril. As the storm continues unabated, the sailors cast lots to discover on whose account the trouble has come upon them. The lot falls on Jonah, who is asked to tell them from what country he is, to what people he belongs, and what he has done to bring this trouble upon them. Jonah acknowledges that he is a Hebrew, a worshipper of Jehovah, the God of heaven, and the Maker of land and sea; he further confesses that he is attempting to flee from the presence of Jehovah. The men are greatly alarmed, and ask Jonah what they shall do with him, so that the sea may be calm for them. Jonah bids them take him up and cast him into the sea. Unwilling to be the agents of his death, the sailors row hard to reach the shore, but are unable to do so, for the sea is running higher and higher against them. At last, after calling on Jehovah, and praying Him not to lay the charge of innocent blood upon them, the sailors take up Jonah, and cast him into the sea, which immediately ceases from its raging. Thereupon the sailors worship Jehovah, offer a sacrifice to Him, and make vows.

Jehovah now orders a great fish to swallow Jonah; and Jonah remains in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. Then Jonah prays to Jehovah from the belly of the fish, and Jehovah speaks to the fish, which vomits out Jonah upon the dry land. A second time Jehovah commands Jonah to go to Nineveh, and proclaim against it the word which He shall give him. This time Jonah goes to Nineveh, makes a day's journey through the city, and proclaims, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.' Having discharged his mission, Jonah leaves the city, builds a booth to the east of it, and sits down under the shade, till he sees what is to happen. The issue is what Jonah has feared from the first. The men of Nineveh, from the king downwards, repent of their wickedness, proclaim a fast, and clothe themselves with sackcloth. When God sees their actions, He relents of the evil which He has purposed to bring upon them, and does it not. Jonah is greatly displeased. This, he tells God, is just what he expected of Him! It was because he knew Him to be 'a gracious God, merciful, longsuffering, abounding in love, and relenting of evil,' that he made haste on the former occasion to flee to Tarshish; and now that he has been so deeply humiliated, he beseeches God to take away his life, for it were better to die than to live. God then orders a gourd to grow over Jonah's head, and Jonah is very glad because of the gourd. But next morning God orders a worm to gnaw the gourd, so that it wilts; and when the sun rises, He orders a scorching east wind (the sirocco), which causes the sun to beat straight upon Jonah's head, so that he faints away, and once more prays that he may die, for it were better to die than to live. Thereupon God asks him, 'Art thou so very angry over the gourd?' And when he answers, 'I am angry enough to die,' God says, 'Thou hast had pity upon the gourd, for which thou didst not toil, and which thou didst not make to grow, which came up in a night, and which perished in a night; and should not I have pity upon Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot distinguish between their right hand and their left—and also much cattle?'

IV

Message of the Book

The message of the book is obvious. It is a great missionary appeal. Israel had been chosen and cherished as the people of Jehovah, not that they should hug their privileges to themselves, but that they should share them with all the other nations of the earth. This truth had been enforced by prophets like Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah; but the people had turned a deaf ear to their teaching. Out of the depths of the Exile Deutero-Isaiah had drawn his ideal portrait of Israel as the Servant of Jehovah commissioned to 'set up judgment (that is, true religion) in the earth.' This ideal had been further emphasized by Malachi, when he maintained that Jehovah was more truly honoured among the Gentiles than among His own people (Mal. i. 11), and by the contemporary prophet of the New Jerusalem (Isaiah lvi.–lxvi.) in his vision of a new heaven and a new earth, in which Jerusalem should be the centre of a God-fearing world. Still the people as a whole refused to accept their high calling as the prophet of God to the nations. They preferred to indulge the dreams of Apocalyptic writers like Joel and Zechariah ix.–xiv., in which Israel is pictured rising to triumph over the downfall of its enemies, and in the latter of which (to quote Cornill's words) 'the fantasy of the writer positively wades in the blood of the Gentiles.'[1] The Book of Jonah was written to bring the people to a better mind, to make them realize their responsibilities to the great world around them, and to inspire them with something of God's passion for humanity. Jehovah is the Lord and Saviour, not of Israel alone, but of all men and nations. His ears are open to the prayer of sincerity—whether of Phœnician and other sailors crying to their gods for help in time of need, or of the multitudes of Nineveh turning to Him in response to His prophet's warning—while His heart flows out in sympathy to the sinful men and women of every race, the little children, and even the cattle, who are doomed to perish for no wrongdoing of their own. And they are God's true people who have most of His heart of love, who take upon themselves the sorrows of the world, and in love go forth to seek and save the lost. One can readily understand, therefore, how the book appealed to the imagination of Jesus Christ, how He pored over its gracious teaching, and found in the message of Jonah a 'sign' of His own ministry. On ourselves it is calculated to impress anew the breadth of God's revealing purpose, no less than the fullness of His mercy. God unveils Himself in many ways, by poetry and prophecy, by law and sacrifice, and equally by symbol and parable; for His revelation is through human channels, and nothing human is alien to Him.[2]

Alex. R. Gordon

The Besetting God

Jonah i. 3.—'Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.'

In this book we have, along with other lessons, an exhibition given of the omnipresence of God. Jonah began by ignoring that. He did not wish to do God's will, and he fancied that he could escape from the constraint of it by flight. In another land, hidden among strangers, he would be out of reach of God. That is where the story begins; but running all through it is a curious and subtle demonstration of how God is everywhere. Jonah got out on to the wide sea only to be checked there by God's hand in the storm, to be detected through the working of the lot, to be rebuked by the justice and the compassion of the heathen sailors, and at last to be borne back to his duty by the sea monster. Facing his task again, but with no better inclination, he went to Nineveh, and there he found God humbling the pride of the Assyrian people, and moving them to repentance; at God's call the gourd shot up and withered. God entered into the secrets of

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[1] *The Prophets of Israel*, 167.

[2] The last sentences are based somewhat closely on the author's *Prophets of the Old Testament*, 351 f.

Jonah's heart and read to him the meaning of his own bitterness. For the instruction of all men, the prophet is thus led about in a world where every least considered incident is shown as of God's contrivance. The whole of life appears as like the bush which burned with fire, when the light of God's own presence transfigured every twig and leaf.

1. This attempted flight from God is not uncommon. Men do not, of course, take ship for distant ports with the notion that God's authority has geographical limits, but they constantly shrink from whatever would bring them face to face with Him, and they welcome anything which seems to promise shelter. The reason might be found in the instinct of self-protection. More or less clearly, every one of us feels that if he suffered the thought of God to come close to him, he would need to be a different man. How far that might carry us our instincts do not declare; what strains upon courage and faith it might involve we cannot even guess; but something we must give up of self-indulgence and of unworthy acquaintance, and we dimly fear and shrink away.

Most men, in their instincts, wish to remain in character as they are, and they defend themselves, as from an assault, against all that would bring revolution into their lives. With more or less of consciousness they are hiding; they may use their necessary and honourable callings as a screen, or they may invent more enchaining interests. They read and let another man's thought and emotion stand between them and the need of thinking and feeling for themselves; they work, and try to forget that God asks something of them, and that, if they were true to themselves, they would be different men; plunging into society, they let the talk and laughter of acquaintances drown the voice of God; they accept the conventions of their circle as a rule of life, and thus they avoid any fresh or first-hand dealing with God as to what life should be. It has been said of Macaulay that 'he was always conversing, or reading, or recollecting, or composing, but never reflecting'; and, with a little alteration in the words, the same is true of a mass of men and women.

¶ 'This is the reason,' says Pascal, 'why gaming, and women's talk, and war, and high office are so sought for. It is not that happiness lies in them, for no one imagines that the true beatitude is found in the money won at a gambling-table, or in coursing a hare. . . . That hare could not, in itself, defend a man from thoughts of death and misery, but the excitement of the chase defends him. What they find there is a violent occupation which keeps them from thinking of themselves.'

Nothing should more promptly make us aware of the truth of this than the difficulty we have in what is purely religious. How impatient men are of worship! how quickly they are tired of spiritual teaching! how great a burden the Sabbath is to many, and how eagerly upon that day they flock to whatever has a touch of secularity! Ought it to be a burden to spend an hour in thoughts of God and His will? Is it only the preacher's fault that a light comes into so many faces with the conclusion of the sermon, and that there is a reaction of worldliness at the church door? Adam hiding in the trees is a very ancient symbol, for men are restless until they can bury themselves in their wonted secularities, and escape from the disturbing sense of the presence of the Divine.

¶ I can think of no more telling instance of the evasion of spiritual influence than one that is to be found in the incomparable pages of the great master of Greek philosophic thought. Twenty-three centuries ago there was no more brilliant figure in Athenian society than Alcibiades, soldier, statesman, and leader of fashion—the most daring, the most versatile, the most unprincipled of men. Well, Plato has put him, as it were, into the confessional. And this is what he represents him as saying of the effect produced on his mind by the character and teaching of Socrates. After bearing his personal witness to the strange and almost magical power over the heart of the words of the great Athenian master, he goes on to say, 'No one would imagine that I could ever feel shame before anyone, but before him I do stand rebuked. For when I hear him my heart throbs, and tears gush from my eyes. For he compels me to confess that, in intriguing for place and power, I am neglecting my real self, and all is ill within me. I cannot deny that I ought to do what he bids me, but I go away, and other influences prevail over me. Therefore, I shut my ears and run away from him like a slave, and whenever I see him shame takes possession of me. So I am in a strait betwixt two. Often I feel that I should be glad if he were no longer in the land of the living. Yet, if anything should happen to him, I know full well that I should be the more deeply grieved.'[1]

2. This book shows the other side of the screens which we set up. Jonah flees from God, and, counting each hour at sea an hour gained, he welcomes the freshening breeze which bears him away from his Master. But He makes the wind His messenger, and in a little Jonah discovers that his flight has borne him into the secret place of God. There is an element of grave comedy in the spectacle of a man congratulating himself on his escape, when, all the time, he is running into the net.

¶ De Quincey describes two Spanish deserters who struck across the Andes in their flight and perished on the high snowfields. 'What had frost and snow to do with the quarrel? But great kings have long arms, and these things made themselves sycophantic servants to the King of Spain, and they it was who dogged his deserters up to the summit of the Cordilleras more surely than any Spanish bloodhound or any Spanish marksman's bullet.'

Those who seek escape from the presence of God should consider that the very occupations and interests in which they hide themselves are of His creation. There is no place in which it is more difficult to satisfy God than in our common work. Nowhere are heroism and chivalry more needed than in business; in nothing are we more certain to be judged than in those things which engage us every day. And thus, whenever in our secular calling we would flee from God, we are repeating Jonah's error, for we are hiding where His challenge is most certain to find us out.

In all phases of this flight men are pursued. In each new friendship and relation, in each fresh interest and engagement, He has lessons for us to learn, qualities to exhibit, habits to abandon, services to render. There is nothing secular. The world itself is a screen, but it is a screen of His contriving, to temper for us the brightness of His glory. We could not now endure the fullness of His majesty; and as we look through smoked glasses at the sun, so we learn to know Him through the shadowed medium of the material world.

And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love;
And these black bodies and this sunburnt face
Are but a cloud, and like a shady grove.
For, when our souls have learned the heat to
bear,
The cloud will vanish, we shall hear His voice,
Saying, 'Come out from the grove, My love and
care,
And round My golden tent like lambs rejoice.'

Though we misuse the present, and take God's own creation as a screen to hide Him from us, the time is not far off when creation itself must cease, and the veil be rent from top to bottom, and when we must go out where the shows and pretences of sense have vanished, and the pleasures and the tasks alike are spiritual. 'There they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the light of it,' and existence must be intolerable except for those who have found that it is life to know the only true God. What can be the end of this hunted, fugitive life, whose ideal of comfort is in God's absence? Some have already realized the fact, and they say with Moses, 'I beseech thee, show me thy glory.' They have grown impatient of the limitations of the light, and would fain know as they are known. But others seek congenial twilights. If it were possible, they would take ship, with Jonah, to flee from God's presence; they would welcome a frankly secular earth. That is the mean side of us, the ease-loving, unadventurous side, which is always willing to sell the birthright for a mess of pottage. That degrades and impoverishes everything, and, as George Meredith says, 'Nature comes to have neither music nor meaning, and is rock, stone, tree, and nothing more.' The beauty dies out of things, and the promise. And all God's dealings, with us as with Jonah, have it as their end to raise the nobler part of us to mastery. What we used as screen, He gives us now as a glass through which to see Him; where we seemed far from Him, He makes us know how near He is; and what seemed most secular and least significant He turns to be the real centre of our life.

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[1] J. W. Shepard.

3. We need to be able to see God before we do see Him. A man generally becomes convinced of Providence through his conversion; for when he once has grasped the truth that for him Christ died, it seems to follow as of course that for him God will care in everything. So long as he feels himself an unreckoned unit in the hosts of men, so long will he seek in vain for any confidence that the Most High is making all things work together for his good; but when the assurance breaks in upon his mind that God verily loves him, then all about him there appear tokens and workings of that love. The world, the dead world, in which he had sought to hide, becomes alive, and God is seen in all and through all and over all. That is what Jesus does for us; He narrows every question. The thought of omnipresence is beset with mystery, but He shows us God verily present in Himself, so that we can see Him, and gaze, and lay hold upon Him. It is a world of confusion and dimness, but Jesus is a centre of light about which there gathers a new world of certitudes. ‘The Son of God who was preached among you by us,’ says Paul, ‘was not yea and nay’—a tissue of ambiguities and uncertainties —‘but in him was yea.’ And those who know Him thus make their home not with the things which perplex, but with those which are clear. Mysteries encompass them still, but they know that Christ can help them on their way, that He has gifts of life and healing, and that matters which now are greatly dark will one day be made plain.

Only matter's dense opaqueness
  Checks God's Light from shining through it,
And our senses, such their weakness,
  Cannot help our Souls to view it.

Till Love lends the world translucence,
  Then we see God clear in all things.
Love's the new sense, Love's the true sense,
  Which teaches us how we should view things.[1]

Fleeing from Nineveh

Jonah i. 3.—‘Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.’

1. Jonah is so many-sided and provocative and familiar a character that it would take a biography to exhaust him. How faulty God's chosen agents can be! And yet He chooses them, bears with them, comes down to their level and pleads with them. The rather crude anthropomorphism with which God is presented here should not deflect us from root principles. ‘Jonah’ belongs to a primitive age. But all the trouble God had with Jonah He has with us, though we do not recognize it, because the local situation is so different, and the terms and symbols of that distant age are so strange to us. How Jonah clung to a localized idea of God! And how modern that is: and how hard it was and how bitter his experience before that could be hammered out of him! The utter childishness and yet the twentieth-century up-to-dateness of the man who firmly believed in God in Palestine, but who thought he could escape Him by going to Tarshish, and who did not believe, and did not want to be convinced, that God's mercy extended to Nineveh. Those who have read Sir James Frazer's *Folklore in the Old Testament* will know the history of the idea of the local God; an idea that creeps out again and again in the Old Testament, that Jehovah was localized in Palestine, only of any serious concern when He was worshipped in His own territory and under formalized conditions—either ‘in this mountain’ or ‘at Jerusalem.’ A very old idea that, cruder farther back, but persisting in modified forms and expressions right down to the time of Christ. Though they had grown out of the idea of a territorial God, the Jews still believed that Jehovah was only a national God—God of the Jews and to be worshipped only at Jerusalem: that even Samaria was outside His territory and jurisdiction. ‘The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans’—because they thought that God had not.

The idea is not dead yet. Jonah is the first great missionary book. It marks an epoch in the history of world religion. Do we not know Christian people who do not believe in missions: who do not believe that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the God of the whole earth; who, though they would be shocked if you told them so, really believe in a territorial God—a God for England and America and Europe, but not for India and China? It won't bear thinking of, because it won't bear thinking out. And yet it is no wonder that people disbelieve in the alternative, because they are afraid of it—the magnitude of it, the difficulty of it; and flee from the presence of the Lord before it. Surely one of the greatest obstacles to the progress of the Church to-day is the persistence of this illusion in yet another phase—the idea that you can truly worship the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ only in certain places and in certain forms. It is not really religion, but only the persistence of the idea of the territorial God, for one community of Christians to refuse to sit at the same table with another community. This sort of local religion clearly implies only a local God. It is a reversion from the conception of God as universal, which God Himself was trying to bring home to Jonah, and which received its highest sanction in that topmost peak of Divine revelation—'No longer in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father, for God is spirit, and they that worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.'

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[1] Owen Meredith.

¶ When Dr Jowett some years ago preached in Durham Cathedral, a clergyman rose to protest in the name of 'God'—the God of the Anglican but not of the Congregationalist. 'Jowett had entered the pulpit, and, after offering the invocatory prayer, was just announcing his text when a clergyman seated in the nave stood up and in a loud voice shouted: "I am the Vicar of Wheatley Hill, and I call upon all loyal Churchmen to protest. . . ." Angry voices drowned the rest of the sentence. In the momentary confusion a group of Durham miners started to sing "When I survey the wondrous Cross," and during the singing the protesting clergyman was hustled out of the Cathedral. Apparently unperturbed, Jowett stood watching the scene, and then quietly he announced his text, and began the sermon. His subject was "Supplementing the Sufferings of Christ." He made not the slightest reference to the peculiar nature of the service, and his sermon was quite free from any controversial suggestion. He spoke in a tone of quiet but intense impressiveness, and was heard with rapt attention by the congregation.'[1]

2. As long as he was able to retain his conventional view of God—a God circumscribed by the traditional forms and discreetly defined as to territory and scope—Jonah was placid enough. But as soon as he began to find how great God really is, it was too much for him, and he fled from the presence of the Lord—a God who began to break down accepted barriers, who declined to be restricted to Israel or the discreet ceremonies of the Temple, who began to claim Nineveh, the Nineveh of traditional enmity, the Nineveh of politics, of business. When God begins to seem to have an opinion about slums and the conditions of labour, and the drink problem; when He begins to extend His claims to all the despised or disliked, or neglected Ninevehs of the world, many a Jonah turns to flee. The burden of the Lord is too great for him. Consider some modern Ninevehs.

(1) *Intemperance.*—In America the alcohol question had been the sport of the politicians for generations. It was Nineveh, outside God's area, too big a problem for any one's solution. Nobody would dare to touch it, till the united Churches of America decided to go to Nineveh. It was the Churches that forced Prohibition upon America; and, whether the solution is sound and permanent or not, it shows what can be done by a unified and determined Church in bringing a political and economic Nineveh into the territory of the Lord, when it ceases to flee from its task however gigantic.

(2) *War.*—There is the Peace question—another Nineveh. 'War must always be,' they say. In other words, the Nineveh of international politics must always be outside God's jurisdiction; for no one imagines that God believes in war. War is made by politicians and financiers: not by soldiers, they know too much about it; nor by the people, who in the end are always the losers. If the Churches flee from their commission here and quail before the magnitude of the task and relax a jot of their energies until this extra territorial tract—this modern Nineveh—is brought within the sway of the God of the whole earth, they will deserve the fate that awaits them. United Christianity can stop war. The universality of God, the extension of His claim not only to every nation, but to every area and territory of national life—it is an enormous, incredible task: and like Jonah of old, we flee from it.

¶ 'War is possible,' says Mr Leyton Richards, 'because statesmen can rely upon the peoples to accept certain others as their official "enemies"; but let it be known that the Church will never acquiesce in this mechanical and wholesale breach of fellowship, and she would go far to paralyze the hand of war.

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[1] Arthur Porritt, *J. H. Jowett*, 202.

Indeed, if there should ever be a "next war," the prime responsibility for the calamity will rest upon the Christian Church because she did not—while yet there was time—give due warning to the world that the professed disciples of the Prince of Peace could never again be inveigled into battle.'[1]

Nations are 'called' like men: and England and America to-day do seem to be specially called to the moral leadership of the world. If England and America, instead of chaffering about the tonnage of cruisers and the range of guns, could decide upon a combined peace principle and policy, what the rest of the world did or did not do would not matter much. To allow small pinpricks to irritate us into a resentful inactivity, or to allow national pride to stand in the way of this Divine commission were surely as much to flee from the face of the Lord as did Jonah of old.

(3) *Missions.*—Specifically for us, too, there is the Nineveh of the Mission Field, enormously more difficult to-day, complicated as the problem is by the westernization of China and India. It is the magnitude of the task that appals men and causes them to flee from the presence of the Lord. We might measure ourselves against the problem in Palestine and in England, but the world-aspect of the problem paralyzes us. What are these among so many? The Missionary Society is always asking for money and for men. The work is never done: it never will be done within any limits that we can see. If they stop asking they have stopped believing: if they stop appealing they have failed. Do not dread fresh appeals: only dread the possibility of no more appeals, of a Church that is fleeing from the presence of the Lord, from her Divine commission. It is either too much for us, or it is not worth doing. It is either super-natural—that is, God is definitely in it, behind it, sustaining it, and will not and cannot be satisfied with less than the whole world and every phase of the life of the world as His possession—or it is nothing. A Church that ceases to be missionary ceases to be Christian; and its candlestick will be removed.

¶ The religion of Christ is a dynamic and active force, and not merely static and stationary. Therefore churches all over the world which show no energy and force flowing out to enrich the world and its peoples in the work of evangelization become dead to all intents and purposes.[1]

Nineveh Repentant

Jonah iii. 5.—'So the people of Nineveh believed God.'

UNDER every form and character of human life, beneath all needs and all habits, deeper than despair and more native to man than sin itself, lies the power of the heart to turn. It was this and not hope that remained at the bottom of Pandora's Box when every other gift had fled. For this is the indispensable secret of hope. It lies in every heart, needing indeed some dream of Divine mercy, however far and vague, to rouse it; but when roused, neither ignorance of God, nor pride, nor long obduracy of evil may withstand it. It takes command of the whole nature of a man, and speeds from heart to heart with a violence, that, like pain and death, spares neither age nor rank nor degree of culture. This primal human right is all that is claimed here for the men of Nineveh.

The writer of the Book makes no attempt to record an historical conversion of this vast heathen city. For its people he claims only the primary human possibility of repentance; expressing himself not in this general abstract way, but as Orientals, to whom an illustration is ever a proof, love to have it done—by story or parable. With magnificent reserve he has not gone further; but only told into the prejudiced faces of his people, that out there, beyond the Covenant, in the great world lying in darkness, there live, not beings created for ignorance and hostility to God, elect for destruction, but men with consciences and hearts, able to turn at His Word and to hope in His Mercy—that to the farthest ends of the world, and even on the high places of unrighteousness, Word and Mercy work just as they do within the Covenant.[2]

1. How did Nineveh return to God? The movement began with the people and spread to the throne; it was the heart of a nation, clutching at the one hope of escape from an approaching doom. An alien prophet had

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[1] *The Christian's Alternative to War*, 145.

[1] Sadhu Sundar Singh.

[2] G. A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, ii. 532.

brought the word. For a whole day he passed through the lanes and streets threatening the city with God's judgment upon its sins—one man among a million who alone knew the true God; like the figure described by a modern poet:

> He came to the desert of London town
> Mirk miles broad;
> He wandered up and he wandered down,
> Ever alone with God.

Five words were all he spoke—'Forty days and Nineveh overthrown.' And the words, we read, went straight to every heart. Silence fell upon all the songs; the buying and the selling ceased; the bright colours were hidden; feasting gave place to hunger. The tidings came to the king, and he stepped down from his throne and led the lamentations of his people. A proclamation was issued that none should fail to take his part. By all the means known and sacred in that age they drew near to God.

¶ We read in the *Hellenica*, 'when news came to Athens of the destruction of her fleet at Ægospotami, the cry of woe began at the Piræus, and ran down the long walls to the city, and, on that night, no one slept, and this not only from sorrow for the past or terror for the future, but also from *remorse*, because they felt that what was coming upon them was a retribution for their own faithless and atrocious cruelty to Ægina, to Melos, and to Scione.'[1]

To the author of the Book of Jonah the Word of God was so convincing that only to hear it might lead even Nineveh, that heathen city, to repentance. The record is set forth in the prophet, not as a deed accomplished, or an experience already won, but as a daring forecast of faith, one day to be claimed. Some Nineveh would yet repent; some nation would come back with its ranks unbroken to God; till that day the vision should be written and wait.

2. The world waits for a city to repent as this Nineveh repented. It is a new experience to be appropriated; it is reserved for some nation, as a place of honour; it has been partially known, but never perfectly. In cities before now the righteous men have prayed and won their fellows from doom; but no Nineveh has cried with all its voices in unison to the Almighty. But nothing less than that is the ideal of a nation on its knees.

If a nation is to return to God, there must be the voice of the prophet with the Word of God upon his lips. There is still need for the prophet or a prophetic Church; and the mark of the prophet is to be found in his supreme faith in his word as the word of the most High God; it is a word which bears upon the situation in which the nation is found, but it is always the counsel of the Just and Holy God which burns within his heart so that he cannot contain. That burden may still be laid upon one solitary being, or it may be shared; there may be a lonely Amos coming from his wilderness to preach the word; or there may be a group, or a Church, using many approaches for the same proclamation. No one can say of any method that it is ruled out beforehand, no one can assume that, because one method was followed in Israel, it must be followed still. One thing is clear; without the Word of God there will be no new life in a nation; there must be the Word of God proclaimed by His prophet.

But can it be delivered in any sense with the hope that a nation, as a nation, may hear and readjust all its life to the new Word of God, which is the new fact? In other ages it might be possible, it is urged, but not now. The ancient states were more compact. One voice might be heard throughout the length and breadth of a Nineveh; but how can there be any one issue set before a vast nation like ours? How can it act as one mighty being? How can it be made to hear the same word and face the same situation?

Has not the very size of our modern nations ruled out anything like a common repentance? Yet there are other things than vastness to be considered. There are the new and swifter ways from soul to soul; there are new lines of communication between separated lives; so that one great voice, if it were here to speak, could still reach almost in a moment all the nation. One emotion can be experienced by all the scattered members. Who that lived through August 1914 can doubt this? The nation, in the early days of that month, changed its entire direction of thought and energy in the light of a new and, as it seemed, decisive fact. The change of mind which is called in the New Testament 'repentance' is not inconceivable, even when we speak of vast peoples; we have known already one such change. But what if there is a call more imperative—a need more urgent? What if this, too, were proclaimed in the ears of all men? Before that is done there will be no return to God.

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[1] J. A. Hutton.

Again, it may begin with the people, and the cry rise in a crescendo till all are swept into it, from the greatest to the least; or it may begin with those who are entrusted with power and leadership. These may be the first, and the vast multitudes may follow. There is no way whereby we may standardize the Divine method.

3. What, then, is the relevant fact which needs to be proclaimed? What is the Word of God for a nation in its collective life? How can it repent and return to its Lord, and in Him find its true life?

It was doom on the lips of Jonah. There is the note of doom in the Word; but there is more. It is not the cry to the nation—'Forty days and Britain shall be destroyed!' There is always judgment in the prophetic voice, but in no such dramatic form does the word come to us. No new message of judgment is needed but the old one which we have had from the beginning; for it is plain as history can make it that doom rests upon the nation which will not adjust itself to the spiritual situation when that is set forth. The nation that ignores God must perish. No prophet is needed to tell nations to-day that certain ways, if they are followed, lead to the decay and fall of nations. Europe is beginning to discover for itself that it cannot afford not to be Christian.

It is not in the word of doom that the characteristic message of God comes. Christ came not, and comes not, to condemn the world, but to save. His Word to the nation is not a warning of death, but a call to the nation to serve His purpose—a call to bring all treasures into the commonwealth of mankind; a call to the nation to die unto its egoism and adjust itself to the Cross of Christ, by which nations no less than individual souls find a world crucified to them. The word of the Cross is still the word to bring nations to their true life.

When the Cross is proclaimed as the burning centre of the Divine Revelation to a people, what it means must be this. There in the Cross is the Word and Act of God; there are His values; there is the measure of all natural aims; there is the call to all who love their nation. To recognize that Word of the Cross as the very heart of eternity; to interpret its call in terms of service—of sacrificial service; to lay down all ambitions that are out of place there; to face the new world with His kingdom—the kingdom of Just and Holy Love, supreme in thought and in purpose—that would be to repent.

The Wideness of God's Mercy

Jonah iv. 10, 11.—'Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?'

1. We know now that the Book of Jonah was an appeal to the Jewish Church of the day to abandon its exclusiveness; to think less of its rights and more of its duties; to believe indeed in its own election, but to rise to the true idea of election, namely, that God chooses a man or a nation not merely for the sake of the man or the nation, but in order that through that man or that nation He may come into touch with other men and other nations. Israel's election was an election to privilege only that it might be an election to service, 'I will bless thee and make thy name great'—so ran the ancient promise to Abraham—'and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' This was the Divine purpose—to fit the few for the salvation of the many. And some at least there were who did not fail to read aright the true significance of their nation's calling. But for the most part—and this was the tragedy of Israel's history—the people's eyes were holden that they could not see it. God was their God and theirs alone; if He had any dealings with the surrounding nations it was only in the way of judgment. Then came the tremendous experience of the Exile, when Israel was

> Heated hot with burning fears,
> And dipt in hissing baths of tears,
> And battered with the shocks of doom
> To shape and use.

But not all the sorrows of exile availed to bring home to Israel God's purpose to the nations through it. And to the strength of its stubborn exclusiveness there was added the fire of its passion for vengeance upon the peoples that knew not God and that had lifted up their hands against His chosen.

Such was the prevailing national temper when the author of the Book of Jonah took up his pen to write, and it was against this temper that his book was a protest. To him had been granted a larger knowledge of the ways of God with men, and the purpose of his writing was to urge the truth which he had seen upon the prejudiced and reluctant minds of his people.

We recall the prudence, the art, the tact, the tenderness with which the writer pleads the case of the heathen world. How he bids his countrymen think of Nineveh not as a place of pomp and strength, not as a fortified and self-sufficient city. How, rather, he bids them think of Nineveh as a place where masses of poor hard-pressed people live with not much sunshine in their lot. He makes no reference to those things about Nineveh which would have opened up old sores—such as its strength, its engines of war, its unconquered armies. He speaks only of its humanity, only of the multitudinous homes of obscure people who have no quarrel with the Jews. Just as in those tense years before our great war let loose the floods it would have been well had we been able to catch the ear of the Germany which lay behind the Germany of our fears, had we been able to think less, and had she given us grounds to think less, of Germany as a country with an invincible army and a threatening navy, and had been able to imagine and to remember the masses of human beings who are not generals, and not politicians, but plain people working for their living amid difficulties very like our own, with little children looking to them for food.

Further, we recall how Jonah preached to Nineveh and how that great city listened to his message and acknowledged its sin. We remember how that chapter ended—how God saw that they had turned from their evil ways; whereupon 'God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.' And then we read the amazing words that 'it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.'

2. What made the prophet angry? There are those who say it was because his words had turned out to be false. He had predicted the fall of Nineveh in forty days: and now Nineveh was to be spared. Therefore he had all the anger of a disappointed man. Many a prophet, many a psalmist, had declared on a day of national calamity that God would yet take vengeance upon the heathen. Many a passage in the Hebrew Scriptures glows and burns with the thought that one day the proud nations of the earth shall be brought to the dust because of their behaviour to Zion. And now the Jews were beginning to see that those nations were to be spared. This Book of Jonah went even further, and declared that it was the will of God not only that those heathen nations should not be destroyed, but that the Jewish Church and nation should go out and try to bring them within the covenant, and to the knowledge of the true God: 'and this displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was very angry.'

But there was more in Jonah's anger than mere concern for his own reputation as a prophet. He was jealous of God, angry at God for going to such lengths in love. And there, let us be fair. If we as a nation are now free from the fierceness and pitch of Jonah's religious hatred, it is due largely to our circumstances as God has ordered them. We have no idea of what it must be to be lying under the heel of a foreign power, of a power, too, which we know is on a lower level of civilization than ourselves—of a power, brutal, licentious, having no refinement or hesitation in its conscience. We have no idea of what that must be, or of the fierce feelings pent up to the point of bursting which such a state of things would provoke.[1]

¶ Principal Sir George Adam Smith, who knows the East so well, tells us that to-day in Turkey or in Armenia you may come upon the same pure hatred. There, Christian people have lost all sense of a common humanity with infidels. 'For centuries they have had no spiritual intercourse with them: to try to convert a Muhammadan has been for 1200 years a crime punishable by death.' He tells us that he himself once asked a cultured and devout member of the Greek Church, why, if nothing is due to infidels but destruction, did God create so many Muhammadans; and the answer came hot and fast: 'to fill up Hell!'[1]

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[1] J. A. Hutton, *The Persistent Word of God*, 81

¶ 'How is it,' asks Dr Jowett, 'that some people are so much sterner than God? How is it that they are so antagonistic to even a trembling suggestion that God's love may go out far beyond our dreams? In my early ministerial life, when I used to dare to speak about anything and everything, I once ventured to preach on the text, 'And he went to his own place.' The reference is, of course, to Judas Iscariot. I cannot recall what I made of the solemn words, and I am not anxious to recall it. I certainly should hesitate to speak about it now. But I do remember one thing. I remember that, in closing the sermon, I left 'our brother Judas' in the hands of God's wonderful mercy, and I quoted the familiar words of Tom Hood:

Owning his weakness,
His evil behaviour,
And leaving with meekness
His sins to his Saviour.

When I got back to my vestry a lady followed me storming with passion. She knew all about the fate of Judas. She could not have spoken with greater assurance if she had stood by the great White Throne and heard the words of final judgment. And what right had I, she said, to, etc., etc. She was 'displeased exceedingly.' I had rested my bewildered mind in the marvellous hostel of the Divine mercy, and she was very angry.[2]

So Jonah withdrew from the city, and sulked in solitude like the Prodigal's elder brother. To shelter himself from the noonday sun he made a booth of twigs and foliage, and sat there hoping against hope for judgment. And while he waited thus he learned the lesson which God designed to teach him. A gourd sprang up miraculously and spread a grateful shade over him against the heat; next morning, no less miraculously, the gourd was withered. A fierce sirocco wind came up out of the east, and in his distress, and utter vexation of soul, Jonah begged that he might die. Then the moral was driven home. 'Do you understand my pity *now*? You did not labour for that herb—only a gourd!—yet when it perished were you not sorry for its destruction? Think of My sorrow if My hand of judgment had had to slay the multitudes of Nineveh.'

What followed—what effect the Divine rebuke had upon the prophet, what became of him—is all unsaid. The effect is that of a striking tableau on which the curtain drops. The prophet appears, in all his discontent at the wideness of God's mercy in admitting the heathen to His grace, just long enough for us to hear the Divine voice correcting his selfish thoughtlessness, and then vanishes utterly. What a world of meaning reverberates in those parting words of the Spirit of goodness—'and also much cattle'—in which the wants of the whole brute creation are shown dwelling in the compassionate remembrance of their Maker, equally with the wants of His elect servants!

The Being that is in the clouds and air,
That is in the green leaves among the groves,
Maintains a deep and reverential care
For the unoffending creatures whom he loves.

. . . . .

One lesson, Shepherd, let us two divide,
Taught both by what she shows, and what conceals;
Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.[1]

3. Where in all the Old Testament is there so moving a parable of the love of God? It is a witness to the catholicity of Divine grace; it is the Old Testament counterpart to 'God so loved the world.' 'It is teaching so lofty and noble as this Book contains,' writes George Jackson, 'which makes one so wholly impatient of the wild and foolish things which even intelligent people still sometimes suffer themselves to speak concerning the God of the Old Testament. Take this, for example, from the pen of one of our most accomplished living writers: "I thought," he says, "of the terrible God of my childish days. In the Old Testament which we used to read He seemed to be always doing fierce, harsh, furious things; He was silent, invisible, severe, listening round corners, staring at one in the darkness, always ready to disapprove and to punish, only thinking that one was well employed when one was attending dreary services or reading the Bible."[2]

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[1] *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, ii. 527.
[2] *The Eagle Life*, 126.

[1] Wordsworth.
[2] A. C. Benson, *The Gate of Death*, 214.

Really? One wonders in what Bible he had read. Was there no Book of Jonah in it? Did he never read of Jehovah's pity for little children and dumb cattle?'

¶ I have read the Book of Jonah at least a hundred times, and I will publicly avow, for I am not ashamed of my weakness, that I cannot even now take up this marvellous book, nay, nor even speak of it, without tears rising to my eyes, or my heart beating higher. This apparently trivial book is one of the deepest and grandest that was ever written, and I should like to say to every one who approaches it, 'Take off thy shoes, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.'[1]

Can we wonder that our Lord Himself makes use of this noble book, so congenial to His own teaching? The 'sign of Jonah' was the truly surprising appearance of a Hebrew prophet among the guilty heathen, proving God's care even for ignorant idolaters and sinners, and His desire to give them an opportunity to receive the tokens of His far-reaching love.

The prophetic story rouses us to shake off our narrow and selfish conceptions of religion. We are not fulfilling our religious duty towards ourselves unless we are at the same time trying to fulfil our larger duty towards the world outside. At the centre of our religion lies the missionary obligation. We are chosen not for our own sake, but that others through us may be brought into the Kingdom. Let us never cease to contemplate the universal purpose of God, and lay to heart the truth that if our Saviour Christ hath been made a minister of the circumcision for His own people, it is that the Gentiles may glorify God for His mercy.

It is God: His love looks mighty,
  But is mightier than it seems!
'Tis our Father: and His fondness
  Goes far out beyond our dreams.

There's a wideness in God's mercy,
  Like the wideness of the sea:
There's a kindness in His justice,
  Which is more than liberty.

But we make His love too narrow
  By false limits of our own;
And we magnify His strictness
  With a zeal He will not own.

There is plentiful redemption
  In the blood that has been shed;
There is joy for all the members
  In the sorrows of the Head.[1]

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[1] C. H. Cornill, *The Prophets of Israel*, 170.

[1] Faber.

THE BOOK OF MICAH

INTRODUCTION

I

Life and Personality of Micah

The prophet Micah was a younger contemporary of Isaiah. Born towards the close of Uzziah's brilliant reign, he began to prophesy on the eve of the downfall of Samaria (721 B.C.), and continued his ministry till the invasion of Sennacherib twenty years later. But the great crises of his time he viewed with different eyes from Isaiah. The latter prophet was a native of Jerusalem, supremely interested in the fortunes of that city. He was, moreover, a man of birth and breeding, the associate of kings and nobles, an aristocrat in every instinct of his nature. Micah, on the contrary, was a peasant farmer of Moresheth Gath, an insignificant village in the Shephelah, or foot-hill country of Judah, overlooking the Philistine city of Gath. His sympathies were as democratic as Isaiah's were aristocratic. What moved him to the heart was the plight of his poor neighbours in the Shephelah, so ruthlessly evicted from their homes, and ravaged by foreign invaders. For the impending fate of Jerusalem he had no pity to waste. In his eyes Jerusalem was the home of the exploiters who preyed upon his people, and whose tortuous politics brought upon them the horrors of invasion. On these enemies of Judah (as he regards them) the prophet hurls his fieriest bolts of judgment. In doing so, he uses none of Isaiah's splendour of diction. His accent is equally of the countryside—plain, blunt, sometimes even rough—though his lips quiver with emotion when he touches on the sorrows his people have to endure through the sins of their oppressors. Apart from a general fondness for assonance and alliteration, the only sign of conscious art in his prophecies is the amazing series of plays on words in the panorama of invasion (i. 10–16). But as words were conceived by him almost as living things, charged with an incalculable power for weal or woe, the plays are intended not to produce a purely literary effect, but to point the edge of his sympathy. Here, as elsewhere, simplicity, sincerity, and sympathy are the hall-marks of his style, no less than of his character.

II

Analysis of the Book

The Book of Micah falls naturally into three parts, distinguishable in the main by their contents, their outlook, and their literary form.

1. The burden of the prophecies in chap. i.–iii., with the exception of ii. 12 f., is denunciation of sin, accompanied by threats of approaching punishment. These prophecies are universally ascribed to Micah. They bear the stamp of his personality, and they fit the background of his time. Together they form a dramatic whole, which leads up to a definite climax. The first scene opens with an appeal to the nations to hear the witness of Jehovah, who is coming from His place to tread upon the heights of the earth, and to cause them to melt under Him like wax before the fire (i. 2–4). All this, the prophet explains, is for the transgression of Israel and the sin of the house of Judah, incarnate in the two capitals, Samaria and Jerusalem, the former of which is soon to be turned into a heap of field-ruins, or the beds of a vineyard, and the latter to be smitten with an incurable wound (i. 5–9). In the next scene the prophet describes a devastating storm, in the shape of an invading army, most probably that of Sennacherib, sweeping over the peaceful townships of the Shephelah, and spreading havoc on every side (i. 10–16). Then he turns upon the rich landlords of Jerusalem, who covet fields and seize them, ousting their peasant owners from the heritage of their fathers, and driving them with their wives and children to starvation and death. For this crime, he says, Jehovah is planning against them a disaster from which they shall be unable to withdraw their necks or to stand erect (ii. 1–5). It is vain for them to attempt to shut the prophet's mouth either by sarcastic phrases or by appeals to Jehovah's goodness to His people. Truly He is good to His people; but they are the enemies of His people, and must themselves

suffer the fate of the outcast (ii. 6–11). With equal vehemence he denounces the prophets, priests, and princes of Judah, who eat the flesh of God's people, yet lean on Him, and say, 'Is not Jehovah in the midst of us? No misfortune can befall us.' Because of them, he warns the people, 'Zion shall be ploughed as a field, Jerusalem shall become ruins, and the Mountain of the Temple a high place in a forest' (iii. 1–12).

2. The next two chapters, iv. and v., contain a series of prophecies turning upon the future glory of Judah and Jerusalem, all of them clearly post-exilic in date. The series begins with the vision of the Mountain of Jehovah's House (iv. 1–4), which has already found a place in Isaiah ii. 1–4. This is followed by a radiant prophecy of the return of the exiles of Judah and the restoration of the former kingdom to 'the height of the daughter of Zion' (iv. 6–10), with its counterpart in the treading down of the Gentile nations under the hoof of 'the daughter of Zion' (iv. 11–v. 1). The sequel appears in the coming of the Messianic King from Bethlehem Ephrathah to shepherd His flock in the strength of Jehovah (v. 2–4). Under His rule the remnant of Jacob shall be as irresistible among the nations as a young lion among the flocks of sheep (v. 5–9). Then also shall Jehovah purify His people from all their idolatries, and make them worthy to be His people (v. 10–15).

3. The third part, consisting of chapters vi. and vii., is more miscellaneous in character and date. The authenticity of the whole section has been vigorously challenged; but vi. and vii. 1–6 are still most plausibly to be assigned to Micah. In the forefront the prophet sets Jehovah's case against His people (vi. 1–5), clinching the argument by his great statement of the duties of religion pure and undefiled (vi. 6–8). Over against this ideal he draws a dark picture of the city's sin and punishment (vi. 9–16), with a companion picture of the moral collapse of the people (vii. 1–6). The rest of the chapter belongs to the troublous times succeeding the Exile. The people are sitting in darkness, but soon they shall rise again; for Jehovah is their light, and He shall bring them forth to the light (vii. 7–10). On that day the walls of Jerusalem shall be rebuilt, and its border shall extend to a far distance (vii. 11–13). For there is no God like Jehovah, who forgives iniquity and passes by transgression. He shall cast all their sins into the depth of the sea, and shall show to them the loyalty and love which He swore to their fathers from the days of old (vii. 14–20).

III

The Message of Micah

The range of Micah's preaching is more limited than that of Isaiah. He was a peasant, not a statesman. Looking at life from the peasant's point of view, he saw in the land question the throbbing pulse of the social problem. To him the wealth of the nation consisted, not in the abundance of its worldly treasures, but in the richness of its human stock, especially in the strength of the young life growing up to manhood and womanhood in the homes of the people. The men who wasted this wealth—the heartless monopolists who exploited the miseries of the poor to evict them from their homes—were the deadliest enemies of the nation. As the prophet says, they robbed Jehovah and His people of their true glory. On these men, therefore, he poured out the fullest vials of Divine wrath. The intensity of his feeling on this question gave him a depth of insight into the heart of things which even his great contemporary failed to reach. Isaiah could hardly conceive of a Kingdom of God without its stable centre in Jerusalem; but for Micah no earthly citadel, however sacred its associations, was essential to the upbuilding of the Kingdom. The real citadel of the Kingdom lay in the hearts of faithful men and women, the simple ones who feared God and did His will. This depth of insight helped him also to focus in one burning point of light the divergent rays that shone through the teaching of the earlier prophets. Samuel had long ago placed the emphasis on obedience rather than sacrifice. "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. xv. 22). The creative prophets of the eighth century B.C. maintained the same emphasis, but vitalized the abstract idea of obedience. Amos identified it with justice, Hosea with mercy (kindness, grace, or love), and Isaiah with holiness. Micah blended all three notes in his statement that what Jehovah requires of man is not sacrifice, however elaborate or extreme—even if it be the offering up of one's first-born son as an atonement for the sin of the soul—but simply 'to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God' (vi. 8).

IV

The Messages of the Later Sections

There is less that is original in the later elements of the book, though some noble passages are enshrined in them also. These sections follow in general the line of thought in Deutero-Isaiah and other late prophets of hope. Jehovah has led His people into the land of exile; but He cannot leave them there (iv. 10). He is bound not only by His own character—for 'Who is a God like unto Him, a God that keepeth not up His anger for ever, because He delighteth in kindness?' (vii. 18)—but also by His promises of grace to Abraham and Jacob in the days of old (vii. 20). As soon, therefore, as He hears His people's acknowledgment of their sin, He will freely forgive them, and will take up their case, and will gather together the outcasts, and will bring them back to their own land, and will reign over them on Mount Zion from henceforth even for ever (ii. 12 f., iv. 6 f., vii. 8 f.). The rule of Jehovah is mainly conceived as personal; but in the famous prophecy of v. 2–4 He delegates His authority to the Messiah, who is represented as coming from Bethlehem Ephrathah, not so much because that is the ancestral home of David, from whose ancient lineage He is, as because it is 'too small a place to be reckoned among the communities of Judah' (v. 2)—a fine reflection of the democratic spirit which pervades this part of the book as well as Micah's own words. The restoration is ultimately to include the Northern tribes, who will then be united for ever with their brethren of Judah (v. 3). The attitude towards the heathen nations varies in different sections. For the most part it is implacably hostile. The nations are to be threshed like grain on the threshing-floor of Mount Zion, or crushed under the hoof of triumphant Jerusalem (iv. 12 f.), trampled and torn by the remnant of Israel, as by a young lion in his strength (v. 8), or trodden down like mire of the streets (vii. 10), and made to lick dust like the serpent (vii. 17). Happily, there is included the vision of Mount Zion as the exalted centre of a God-fearing world, to which the nations stream for instruction in the ways of Jehovah, with the result that they live together in the spirit of peace and good-will towards one another, submitting their disputes to the arbitration of Jehovah, and learning the art of war no more, but dwelling 'each one under his vine and under his fig-tree, with none to make them afraid' (iv. 4)—a fitting climax, which is found only in this version of the prophecy.

Alex. R. Gordon

The Golden Age

Micah iv. 1.—'But in the latter days it shall come to pass' (R.V.).

The prophet lifts his eyes away to the latter days to gain refreshment in his present toil. He feasts his soul upon the golden age which is to be, in order that he may nerve himself in his immediate service. Without the anticipation of a golden age he would lose his buoyancy, and the spirit of endeavour would go out of his work. Our visions always determine the quality of our tasks. Our dominant thought regulates our activities. What pattern are we working by? What golden age have we in mind? What vision of possibility is helping us to shape the actual? In our work and service are we dealing with the 'might-be' or only with the thing that is? Sir Titus Salt was pacing the docks at Liverpool and saw great quantities of dirty, waste material lying in unregarded heaps. He looked at the unpromising substance, and in his mind's eye saw finished fabrics and warm and welcome garments, and he lived to devise the means for converting this ugly stuff into refined and finished robes. And this is Christ's way. He is always calling the thing that is by the name of its 'might-be.' He looks at Simon—impulsive, unstable Simon—and He sees in him a sure foundation-stone: 'Thou shalt be called Peter,' a rock. To the woman of sin, the outcast child of the city, He addressed the gracious word 'daughter,' and spoke to her as if she were already a child of the Kingdom; and her weary heart leapt to the welcome speech. We must make Christ's way our way. We must come to our work and our problems with the vision of the 'might-be' in them.

The great reformers and all men and women who have profoundly influenced the life and thought of their day have been visionaries, having a clear sight of things as they might be, feeling the cheery glow of the light and heat of the golden age. Abraham, amid the idolatrous cities of his own day, had a vision of the latter days, and, while labouring in the present, 'looked for the city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.' The Apostle John, in the Island of Patmos, while impressed with the iniquity of Rome seated on her seven hills, and drunk with the blood of saints, saw through the Rome that was to the Rome that might be, 'The holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.' And so it has been through all the changing centuries right down to our own time.

¶ When North and South America were locked in bloody strife, and it seemed as though the future were pregnant with nothing but quarrel and discord, John Bright lifted the eyes of his countrymen to the glory of the latter days: 'It may be but a vision, but I will cherish it; I see one vast federation stretch from the frozen north in unbroken line to the glowing south, and from the wild billows of the Atlantic westward to the calmer waters of the Pacific main. And I see one people and one language, and one law and one faith, and over all that white continent the home of freedom and a refuge for the oppressed of every race and every clime.'

What are the characteristics of the golden age to which the prophet was looking with hungry and aspiring spirit?

1. 'It shall come to pass, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills.' That is to say, the dominant peak in the reconstructed landscape is to be spiritual religion. Man's relationship to God is to be the supreme relation overtopping and overseeing everything else. The biggest thing in life is to be the yearning for the Divine communion, the craving for fellowship in the heavenly quest. That is how the prophet's vision is to begin to be fulfilled—in the recovery of vital worship, in the revival of spiritual religion.

'I think of Durham city,' says Dr Jowett, 'as an emblem of the prophet's thought. Away in the lower reaches of the city there is the river, on which boats are plying for pleasure and recreation. A little higher up on the slopes are the places of business, the ways and byeways of trade. A little higher there is the castle hill, on which the turreted tower presents its imposing front; but on a higher summit, commanding all and overlooking all, there rises and towers aloft the majesty of the glorious old cathedral. The river is typical of pleasure, the places of business are representatives of money, the castle is the symbol of armaments, the cathedral is significant of God. In the latter days the spiritual is to have emphasis above pleasure, money, armaments. In whatever prominence these may be seen, they are all to be subordinate to the reverence and worship of God. Military prowess and money-making and pleasure-seeking are to be put in their own place, and not to be permitted to leave it. First things first! 'In the beginning God.'

2. 'And many nations shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.' Then the second characteristic of the golden age is that peoples are to find their confluence and unity in common worship. Brotherhood is to be discovered in spiritual communion. Pleasure is more frequently divisive than cohesive. At the present time we have abundant evidence that commerce may be a severing ministry among the peoples of the earth. And certainly we do not find union in common armaments. Two nations may fight side by side to-day, and may confront each other to-morrow. No, it is in the mountain of the Lord's house that the peoples will discover their unity and kinship. It is in the common worship of the one Lord, in united adoration of the God revealed in Christ that our brotherhood will be attained, and we shall realize how rich is our oneness in Him.

3. 'And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks.' The third characteristic of the golden age is to be the conversion of merely destructive force into positive and constructive ministries. No energy is to be destroyed; it is all to be transfigured. The instruments which desolated the

world are to be turned into instruments which will make it fair and fruitful. It is not enough that men learn war no more, they must go on to learn the higher arts of peace. The ideal life or society does not consist in negations; it deals with its material in a constructive and transforming spirit. It delights to see the pruning-hook in the spear, and it hastens to transform the one into the other.

A great and far-reaching principle this! Nothing need be lost; all things may be transformed. The powers and energies which were dedicated to the cause of evil, if only they be touched and consecrated by a new sense of the meaning of life, will be equally mighty when thrown upon the side of God and good.

¶ One of the Greek philosophers wrote: ‘And this is the greatest stroke of art, to turn an evil into a good.’ Such is the grand mission of the faith of Jesus Christ. It is the work of the devil to debase good things to vile uses; it is the task of the Spirit of grace to make of evil things vessels unto honour, fit for the Master’s use. After the first historic siege of Antwerp, the cannon balls were taken and converted into church bells; and in many ways things, institutions, and methods which for ages have tormented and destroyed society are being transformed into instruments of blessing.

4. ‘They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree.’ It is a picture of contentment. There is to be a distribution of comforts. Life’s monotony is to be broken up. Sweet and beautiful things are to be brought into the common life; and dinginess and want are both to be banished. There is to be a little beauty for everybody, something of the vine and the fig-tree. There is to be a little ease for everybody, time to sit down and rest. To every mortal man there is to be given a little treasure, a little leisure and a little pleasure. ‘And none shall make them afraid.’ They are not only to have comfort but the added glory of peace. The gift of the vine and fig-tree would be nothing if peace remained an exile. There are many people who have both the vine and the fig-tree, but their life is haunted and disturbed by fears. In the golden age peace is to be the attendant of comfort, and both are to be guests in every man’s dwelling.

An Ancient Solution of the War Problem

Micah iv. 3.—‘Nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.’

This beautiful dream of a world at peace, willing to settle by arbitration whatever quarrels should arise among the nations, must have profoundly fascinated the Hebrew imagination. For the passage, in which these great words occur, appears again—at the beginning of the second chapter of Isaiah, and this simple fact suggests that the noble thought enshrined in the passage must have been peculiarly welcome and precious—addressed, as it probably was, to a world torn and distracted by war. For hundreds of years the Hebrews had seldom for any long period been exempt from the experience or the danger, or at least from the rumour and the thought of war. Frequently it had surged up upon their borders and over their borders; even when this did not happen, the sound of it was seldom far away; and passages like this show how weary of it all the better heart of Israel was becoming, and how earnestly it looked forward to the day when the blood-stained swords and spears would be beaten into ploughshares and pruning-hooks, and international disputes could be settled in saner and kindlier ways.

¶ The true patriot longs for the day when no more war-horses and chariots will be seen in the land he loves, but when from end to end it will be filled with the knowledge of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea. One of the dearest wishes of his heart is to see the cruel and bloody accoutrements of war flung once and for ever into the devouring flames. He looks for and believingly works for the day when

Every boot of the warrior that thundered along,
  And every garment rolled in blood
Shall be doomed to the burning,
  And fuel for the fire.[1]

1. Let us look at the passage as a whole; for its three brief verses constitute an ancient solution of the war problem, remarkable alike for its insight and its relevance to our modern world. ‘It shall come to pass in the latter days.’ The truly religious man has always

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[1] J. E. M‘Fadyen, in *The Expositor*, March 1916, p. 174.

his eyes fixed upon the latter days. He sees very clearly what is going on in his own days, and his heart is often sore as he looks upon it all. But he never allows himself to lose hope; for he sees beyond the days that now are, with their sins and confusions and disappointments, to the days when some better thing shall be. To a patriotic Jew, there would be for Jerusalem and the Temple a great place in the better world to which he looked forward. He felt towards Jerusalem as a Roman felt to Rome or as Englishmen to London. Jerusalem was for him the true capital of the world, and the thing of central importance in Jerusalem was the Temple, Jehovah's house on Mount Zion. To it the nations are represented as streaming up; they exhort one another, saying, 'Come, let us go up to Zion.' Why? Because they are conscious that she has something which none of themselves have. She worships a God of international justice. 'He will teach us of His ways,' they confidently say, 'for out of Zion shall go forth the law,' that is guidance, instruction. They are in difficulty, they need guidance, and the God of Jerusalem can give such guidance as no heathen god can give.

It is not quite clear what sort of guidance the nations desire, or in what sort of dilemma they are involved. But this much is plain: that international disputes have arisen which call for wise intervention; and in Zion they find one who will judge and 'decide'—as the American Revised Version properly says—concerning strong nations. This is the Hebrew way of saying that the disputes are settled by arbitration. They come to Zion in faith, and they do not go away disappointed. The Zion of the latter days was to be the embodiment of that justice for which, in their lifetime, the prophets often so eloquently and so vainly pleaded. The nations have submitted their case to arbitration, and so just and satisfactory is the decision they receive in Zion that they go away content, with thoughts of war in their heart no more. 'He decides, and then they beat their swords into plowshares.' The deadly things can be transformed to a noble use, so they beat their swords and spears lustily into ploughshares and pruning-hooks; for their thoughts are now turned away from quarrels and wars and battle-fields to fields of waving grain and terraced slopes of vines, upon which those now transformed instruments can do their beneficent work. Disarmament is the sequel of arbitration. With nations so reasonable, there will be no fear for the world's peace; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

2. Like ourselves, the prophet lived in a world whose nations were ever ready to fly at each other's throats; and here he gives us his solution of the problem, which is full of pregnant suggestions for our own day.

(1) From the prophet we learn that, in order to secure international peace there must be a hatred and horror of war. These nations were fully armed, and might easily have appealed to the arbitrament of the sword, but they had sense enough to choose a more humane and excellent way. Mechanical butchery is surely a barbarous and idiotic way of solving our great human problem; and the forces that make for civilization and religion throughout the world must exert themselves without delay to secure, so far as is humanly possible, that never again shall so savage a solution be attempted.

¶ To-day man has at his service means of destruction which greatly exceed in scope and power even the mightiest weapons employed in the Great War. And it is said that he is on the verge of discovering yet deadlier secrets—secrets so deadly that only the pure in heart can safely be entrusted with them. The 'atomic bombs' of H. G. Wells' prophetic vision may yet be invented, and it may yet be possible for a single aeroplane to fly in a few hours to a great city, hundreds or even thousands of miles away, and lay it in ruins. With such weapons at man's command, the next war, if waged on a large scale—and it is probable that in the next war there will be no neutrals—would be one of racial suicide. Civilization would be entirely overwhelmed; human life would be permanently debased and impoverished; and we might even come within measurable distance of the destruction of the human race. The mere possibility of so stupendous a catastrophe is surely an unanswerable argument for the early abolition of war.[1]

Here, then, is the supreme opportunity of the Church. One may fairly ask whether she has in the past so steadily held this great idea of a world-brotherhood before the minds and consciences of men as she might have done. For long she considered very devotedly the welfare of the individual soul; lately she has begun to rise to an appreciation of her social task and opportunity ; now she must learn to face international obligations and to recognize that her 'field is the world.' There is a powerful sentiment in every nation in favour of the peaceful settlement of international disputes, but it is a floating sentiment, and therefore does not produce the public and political effect to which its volume entitles it. It needs to be stimulated, organized, and given a practical direction, and from this high task the Christian Church dare not stand aloof. Above all earthly institutions it is her business to create and encourage a sentiment in favour of the peaceful settlement of international problems, and so thoroughly to permeate society with this conception that those who hold in their hands the destinies of the nations dare not disregard it. No one Church could effect this; but is it too much to believe that all the Churches of all the nations could, if ministers and people had in them the spirit of the ancient propaganda, which carried the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the world.

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[1] E. Holmes, *The Cosmic Commonwealth*, 100.

(2) In the past war has been the only legal arbiter of international disputes. Another arbiter must be put in its place. We must have a tribunal which the world can trust. Now we have in the League of Nations such a court in the world to-day—no longer an aspiration but a reality. What is the main idea of this League? It is a united human effort to stamp out any attempt at war, as one would a plague that threatened the destruction of mankind; it is also a Brotherhood of Nations pledged to uphold right as against might, to safeguard the weak, and to champion the cause of equity, honour, and freedom. The nations in the League are pledged to each other not to make war upon one another till they have done their utmost to avert it by bringing their disputes before a Court of Arbitration appointed by the League. They also bind themselves to combine against any individual state that breaks this rule. Apart from its political side, the League has already shown itself to be an instrument of unprecedented power for promoting better social and moral conditions all over the world.[1] During the few years of its existence the achievements of the League have been indeed astonishing. It has already prevented six wars; it has saved Austria and Hungary from bankruptcy; it has settled what otherwise would have been some interminable disputes, as in the case of Mosul; and it has enterprises on hand which demand and ought to receive the keen sympathy of every thinking man and woman, as, for instance, the complete abolition of slavery, the suppression of that other ghastly slavery commonly called the white slave traffic.

The League is not a perfect thing, but it goes a long step towards the goal. Our Christian duty is to put our hands and hearts into its work; to give every ounce of effort we can give to secure its strength and progress. It will be really alive and do its full work only when public opinion stands solid behind it and gives it a living soul.

¶ In a novel[1] which has the war as its motive, Mr Harold Begbie gives a vivid picture of the work and aims of the League of Nations. Rashton, one of the great characters in the book, goes to Geneva to offer his services to Dr Ludwik Rajchmann, of Poland, who was a man of genius at the head of the Health Organization of the League. Once in the Geneva atmosphere Rashton gets into touch with the right people. A man named Lindford, who is at the heart of things, says to him: 'What I want to see is a handful of men fighting for this League of Nations as Paul fought for the crucified Christ. Why shouldn't you be one of them? You hated war before I did. It has cost you heart's blood. It's the enemy of all you love. Why not fling yourself into the work of peace?'

Rashton replied that he had come to Geneva rather on the scientific side, the side connected with health.

'Lindford shook his head wearily, "That's no good," he said. "There are scores of people doing that. What the world wants, if it is to be saved, is a man with faith in the power of peace, a man who'll break through all the suspicions and fears and jealousies and hatreds which exist between nations and affirm the essential unity of mankind. Peace won't come by negotiation. Statesmen can't bring it to earth by appending their signatures to compacts. It'll come, Rashton, only when humanity cries for it from the depths of its heart, and that cry will go up to heaven only when a Paul has gone through the world preaching his faith." '

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[1] J. R. Cohu.

[1] *Black Rent.*

Later on Rashton's friend puts another aspect of the League before him.

'I don't know whether you have heard that the League is not only working for disarmament, arbitration, and peace; it's also working for a greater companionship among the nations; it's bringing them together for the purpose of fighting disease, spreading scientific knowledge, improving the conditions of labour in backward countries, putting down the infamous traffic in women and children, and stopping the illicit trade in opium.

'It's really a magnificent effort to realize the essential unity of mankind. And it's in the hands of men who aren't in the least heady with sentimentalism, but are mostly long-headed and far-sighted men who see that this is going to be a job for a lifetime.'

(3) The prophecy asserts that the settlement by arbitration of international disputes 'shall come to pass in the latter days.' Can we believe that? It is not easy; and yet not to believe it is to believe in a God whose will is ultimately to be defeated by the sin and folly of men. Are we prepared to believe that? If the love of justice and the recognition of the rights of others can be made to prevail, justice within the nation between its classes and justice between the nations—and it is the privilege and the duty of the Church to work for this—stable international peace can only be a question of time; and those who are working for this consummation may work in good hope.

¶ In 1849, Victor Hugo, speaking in Paris, said: 'A day will come when war shall appear as absurd and be as impossible between Paris and London, between St Petersburg and Berlin, as it would be now between Rouen and Amiens, between Edinburgh and London, between Boston and Philadelphia. A day will come when the only battle-field will be the market open to commerce, and the mind opening to new ideas. A day will come when bullets and bombshells will be replaced by votes, by the universal suffrage of nations, by the venerable arbitration of a great Sovereign Senate, which will be to Europe what the Parliament is to England, what the Diet is to Germany, what the Legislative Assembly is to France.'[1]

'It shall come to pass.' But how? Not in any miraculous way, but by careful thought and concerted action deliberately directed to that specific end. It will come to pass when Christian democracies are determined to bring it to pass. No one man can do much—the impotence of the individual in the presence of so stupendous a problem is pathetic; but each of us has his own share in the creation of public opinion, and it is for each of us to realize that he is responsible up to the measure of his opportunity. It is ours, first of all, to rebuke and restrain within our own hearts the aggressive and quarrelsome temper, to cultivate a large appreciation of the needs, the rights, the legitimate aspirations of other men, and other nations, to recognize that, if we are all sons of the heavenly Father, we are therefore brethren one of another. To some extent the brotherhood of man is already an accomplished fact. Every international convention, whether of scholars or working men, business men, or scientists, is a practical demonstration of it. Every ship that sails the seas is a testimony to our need of one another. But the bonds must be knit firmer. Those who live in the hope of a more rational and brotherly world must not only long for it but work for it, giving patient and hospitable consideration to all proposals for securing it, and bending all their energies to the accomplishment of the ancient prophet's dream. Then perhaps the glorious days which he foresaw would not be so very far away after all, and we should wake some morning with a glad surprise to find that we were already living in the latter days, when nation would not lift up sword against nation, neither learn war any more.

¶ 'The Prince of Peace' works, as at the first, through those souls whom He has made His own. Through them He reaches and leavens the mass around. Any of us can contribute something to His work, or can refuse the contribution. And each soul that is at peace with itself and with God, works thereby for the cause of universal peace; works for the harmony of the Church and of the world; works for the credit and glory of the 'Prince of Peace.'[2]

[1] J. W. Rowntree, *Palestine Notes*, 162.

[2] H. P. Liddon, *Advent in St Paul's*, 269.

Earth at last a warless world, a single race, a single tongue—
I have seen her far away—for is not Earth as yet so young?
Every tiger madness muzzled, every serpent passion kill'd,
Every grim ravine a garden, every blazing desert till'd;
Robed in universal harvest up to either pole she smiles,
Universal ocean softly washing all her warless isles.

Bethlehem Ephrathah

Micah v. 2.—'Thou, Beth-lehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah' (R.V.).

Bethlehem had been famous of old as being near the spot where Benjamin was born and where Rachel died, and afterwards as the birthplace and home of David. Long before the time of the prophet Micah, however, Bethlehem had sunk into insignificance. So unimportant was it that Joshua in his enumeration of the cities and villages of Judah gives it no mention. It never grew to size, or became of any national importance, except for its associations. In the list of Judean villages which Nehemiah gives after the Captivity it is not named, and in the New Testament, after the birth of Jesus and in that connection its name never once occurs. So little was Bethlehem Ephrathah.

1. How was it that the prophet Micah did not think of Jerusalem as the natural and inevitable birthplace of the Messiah. Why did he fix on Bethlehem, that insignificant village of Judah?

If we study the prophet Micah at all, we cannot help noticing that he was what we call a provincial. He did not live at the capital city Jerusalem, and he did not love it as his own countryside. His contemporary Isaiah lived in the capital and was in intimate touch with Court and Temple, but Micah's home was in the country some thirty miles south-west of the city. He was not too far from the capital to be interested in the movements there, and we find him denouncing the rulers and the rich men and the people of Jerusalem generally, because of their mercenary character, because of the fraud, the oppression, the cruelty, the hypocrisy, which they practised. So he told them that 'for their sakes' Zion should be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem should become heaps of ruins, and the Temple itself as the overgrown mounds of a forest. But Micah not only disliked Jerusalem and its fatal politics: he disliked cities and thought them all bad. It is in the country that social wrongs are felt most acutely! When he is speaking of what the Lord would do in the good time coming, he says that He would take away all the horses and the chariots that were used in war—for Micah, like others, had a great dislike to the use of horses and chariots in war; and then he goes on to say that the Lord would cut off all the cities of the land and throw down all the strongholds. That seemed to Micah a great blessing, and indeed a real necessity. He saw that in cities and in fortified places the Jews were getting hopelessly corrupted from their ancient simplicity. Instead of trusting in Jehovah they learnt to trust in stone walls. Instead of being a nation of small freeholders they were being sharply divided into rich and riotous townsfolk on the one hand and poor villagers on the other who were cruelly oppressed and plundered.

So Micah did not believe in Jerusalem. He knew it must come down, before any real deliverance could come to Israel. But he *did* believe in the house of David. He knew what great promises had been made to David (the 'sure mercies of David'), that his seed should sit upon the throne for ever. But David was only connected with Jerusalem in his latter years. David the shepherd-boy, the conqueror of Goliath, the faithful friend of Jonathan, the generous enemy of Saul—David, the man after God's own heart—was not connected with Jerusalem, but with Bethlehem. Bethlehem made David, Jerusalem only unmade him. What then? Why, the house of David must be cast out of Jerusalem: it must retire again to the lowliness and simplicity of the little old-fashioned village, where men still trusted in Jehovah, and not in wrong and robbery. Leave your proud palaces, cries Micah, in effect, to the house of David; leave your palace-courts, where venal judges sell their justice to the highest bidder; leave your Temple precincts, where mercenary priests and prophets work the oracles of God for private gain. Come back to

Bethlehem, where David lived when God loved him and called him. Bethlehem meant for Micah the old simplicity, and honesty, and faithfulness, and virtue, and poverty; the old trust in God, the old fearless courage to face any odds, the old willingness to endure hardness, the old indifference to pomp, and parade, and show.

¶ Some years ago Dr Norman Maclean of Edinburgh visited Palestine, and in an article written to the *Morning Post* he said: 'Out of Jerusalem, that parched city set in its wilderness of stones, with its atmosphere of narrow pedantry and acrimonious disputes, it is impossible that so beautiful a thing as Christianity could ever have come. The Jew still walks its streets, cringing and arrogant, shadowed by his past. There is nothing left to him but the crumbling wall at which he recites his litany of tears; "For our destroyed temple, here we come and weep! For our fallen glory, here we come and weep." The shortcomings he bewails are those of ancestors long dead. As for himself, he is not as others are. Within the walls of Jerusalem Jesus never found a night's rest. Jerusalem never did aught for Christianity except crucify its Founder. The true home of Christianity is to be found in the flower-strewn glades and valleys of Galilee. Out of Nazareth came the dream of a Kingdom not of this world.'

So Micah comes to the great prophecy, 'thou Bethlehem Ephrathah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel.' There is not anything arbitrary in it or inexplicable. Bethlehem stands in contrast to Jerusalem; it stands for simplicity and poverty and littleness—what is of no reputation in the eyes of men. That is why He whom we worship was born at Bethlehem. His ancestor was a shepherd, and His mother a peasant girl. He Himself was a carpenter; at home, as His parables show, in the fields and the folds and the barns of the country; with the servants of the great houses, with the unemployed in the market; with the woman in the hovel seeking one piece of silver, with the shepherd on the moors seeking the lost sheep. The poor had the gospel preached to them; and the common people heard Him gladly. As the peasants of Judea must have listened to Micah's promise of His origin among themselves with new hope and patience, so in the Roman Empire the religion of Jesus Christ was welcomed chiefly, as the apostles and fathers bear witness, by the lowly and the labouring of every nation.[1]

2. The prophecy was fulfilled in the letter. He *was* born at Bethlehem. But, strange to say, He Himself never apparently alluded to the fact that He was born there. His disciples did not seem to know it until afterwards. The Jews knew so little of the fact that they made it a fatal objection to His claims that the true Messiah was to come from Bethlehem. Our Lord was always known as a Nazarene. Why? Was it because in *His* day it would have been accounted an honour and a distinction to be born at Bethlehem? He did not want that. There was not anything about Nazareth which could give a man any credit or reputation. So He lived at Nazareth. Simplicity, poverty, obscurity, small reputation, had gone to settle at Nazareth; and Jesus followed them thither.

If we were to go to Bethlehem to-day we should find what claims to be the identical cave which once served as the winter-stable of the old inn, the identical place in which the Lord of all was born. We should find it beautifully adorned with marbles and a silver star to mark the very spot; and above it gorgeous buildings, churches, monasteries. No doubt our Saviour would have praised the zeal and the loyalty to Him which prompted these things; but it would have been much better and much more really Christian to have left that stable-cave just as it was, in all its poverty and rudeness. Then, indeed, it would do good to go and see it; for it would remain an everlasting witness to the wonderful love and humility of our Lord. But even the traveller who, with earnest thoughts in his heart, makes his pilgrimage to Bethlehem or Calvary, can only say, 'He is not here, He is risen.' We cannot reconstruct Christmas from the outside, it has to be approached from within.

Though Christ in Joseph's town
  A thousand times were born,
Till He is born in thee
  Thy soul is still forlorn.
The Cross on Golgotha
  Can never save thy soul;
The Cross in thine own heart
  Alone can make thee whole.

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[1] G. A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, i. 416.

3. Little Bethlehem Ephrathah! Out of it, indeed, has issued a Ruler who has transformed the face of the civilized world. There are two virtues which are universally recognized as altogether admirable, and extort when found universal homage, and they are humility and love. Christianity has created the one virtue and reinstated the other. It is interesting to trace the growth of the virtue of humility, so repugnant to the estimates of the ancient world, so contrary to the self-assertion of human nature. And yet there is no doubt as to the admiration which it has won. Self-conceit is not tolerated or regarded as anything else but a blemish. There is recognized as a necessity in anyone who claims to be great that he should know the limitations of human nature, and that there should be in some way an acknowledgment of a power greater than ourselves. We demand disinterestedness from our great men, that there should be no mere acting for self or self-interest. To seek fame, or glory, or notoriety for its own sake may so far attain its immediate object, but at the expense of inner reverence and love on the part of those who watch what they consider to be a blemished career. Humility and love merge in some ways one into the other. Humility helps the man to keep his proper place in God's world. Love shows him how he must reach out on either side of him if he is to fit into the great plan of God's world of which he is but an infinitesimally small part.

¶ A characteristic story is told of the late Principal Cairns, one of the most simple-minded and humble of men. Attending a great public meeting on one occasion in Edinburgh, which was densely crowded, his appearance on the platform was received with loud cheers. Never imagining that this was for himself, he turned and saw following him a man of diminutive stature, and totally unknown. Taking him to be the object of popular applause he stepped aside to let him pass, and as he did so began enthusiastically to join in the clapping. This act, so characteristic of the man, was received with uproarious delight.[1]

We move in a world whose two prevailing ideas of success are connected with advertisement and competition; we are followers of a religion whose two prevailing ideas of progress are humility and love. What is the great evil which we meet around us? Is it not selfishness? Selfishness is at the bottom of all sin. Christ is calling us to-day to strike a blow at this in dissociating ourselves from it. Humility is surely a right recognition of ourselves, love is the right recognition of our neighbour. It is hard to break free from the engrossing love of self; even when we do good we like to take a large percentage of praise for ourselves. When we seek to rectify some evil, we like to do it in our own way. And this is not all; humility suffers from counterfeits, and so does love. It is not humility to think that everything we do is wrong, and love is not to humour our neighbour in everything, right or wrong, which he may desire. Humility and love are both strong virtues. In the one we see an embodiment of the attitude of Christ Himself. 'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart.' In the other we see a characteristic of the disciple who was known as the apostle of love, who once was known as the son of thunder, and who remained to the end stern towards error, because of his love.

These, then, are the virtues which stand out as having their root in the humiliation of Bethlehem. In order to be like our Lord we must love and choose what is simple, what is lowly and arduous. That is the starting-point of true religion, for it was the starting-point of our Lord Himself.

Our Peace

Micah v. 5.—'This man shall be our peace' (R.V.).

For once in her history Judah was under the spell of two great prophets contemporaneously: Isaiah of Jerusalem and Micah of Moresheth. The one was a prince of the city, the other a peasant of the country-side. Yet their indictment of evil and their conception of religion were wonderfully alike. Isaiah was at the capital and in intimate touch with Court and Temple. The subjects of his denunciation are hypocritical worship, unjust gain, and the peculiar vices of the city. Micah, on the other hand, is a peasant, and is concerned with little hamlets of the country-side. The district to the south-west of Jerusalem where he lived bred a sturdy yeoman stock who were not too far from the capital to be interested in its welfare, and not so far removed from the highways of the world as to remain ignorant of the stirring among the nations, for the hills of Micah's home sloped down on to one of the great military routes of the Eastern world. If Micah's is only a peasant's point of view, yet the peasant is deeply concerned in the ravages of war, and the city depends on the peasant for its daily food.

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[1] James Burns.

Let us examine Micah's conception of redemption.

1. He brings a heavy indictment against the social conditions of his time.

He complains that the peasantry are being oppressed by the city folk. It is not always easy to follow the connection of his burning words, and, if it were not that the methods of oppression remain perpetually the same, we should often be left in doubt as to his meaning. But it seems fairly obvious that an era of great commercial prosperity had somehow impoverished the country-side. The wealthy merchants of the city had begun to build themselves country residences and take an interest in farm properties. By methods which remain much the same from age to age the astonished labourers of the soil found, first their peasant-freeholds surrendered to landlords, then their houses no longer their own; their very clothing was taken from them for debt. By processes which were beyond their understanding or powers of resistance, they gradually found themselves growing food that they somehow could not afford to eat, whilst hunger feasted on their frames. It was the same complaint that was heard from the French peasants before the Revolution; speaking of the nobles they said: 'They crop us like grass.'

But cannot some reply be made to these complaints? The reply is to ask the prophet to desist from this fiery declamation; they have heard this story before; they are tired of it, and they dislike both subject and style. If it is true that there is great prosperity in the city and great poverty on the country-side, that can be easily explained. Prosperity is the sign of the favour of God; it is the reward of industry and uprightness. No doubt they also pleaded legal justification for the process by which the peasants were enslaved. They would explain it as due to industrial development, economic evolution, or whatever equivalents they used in those days.

Micah's answer to all this is terrible. But it is not mere denunciation. It is informed by the conviction that moral law is supreme even over economic forces. If this is how their prophets divine the will of the Lord, then darkness shall come upon them all; prophecy and oracle, revelation and guidance shall utterly cease. The very thought of God shall die out of the minds of those who thus put darkness for light. With an insight into economic conditions which is indeed remarkable, he proclaims that the present system will actually end in starvation for the city, as it had already done for the country-side; for you cannot, without injury to yourself, destroy the race that tills the fields and reaps its crops.

2. But alongside his indictment the prophet proclaimed an evangel.

This comes to him first of all as a vision of possibilities. He sees Jerusalem fulfilling a destiny quite other than that conceived by its present inhabitants. It is as the religious capital of the world rather than as a commercial centre that he pictures her future. He dreams of her ruling the peoples by the reverence they feel for her, because from her issues the simple and spiritual religion on which the happiness of man depends. That religion he elsewhere defines as superseding sacrifice and offering by justice in commerce, mercy in judgment, and humility in the heart. And the effect of this religion will be that the nations will learn war no more. Its hideous waste, its moral degradation, its ruinous consequences, will then be recognized by all, and the energies once spent on destruction will be spent on gathering from Nature's stores sufficient for the needs of man, so that all may live in peace and security.

But he has more than a vision. He believes he can see how it is to be brought about. Isaiah had been dreaming the same dreams, and he saw that for their fulfilment a *man* was needed. He believed that Jesse's stock would shoot again and that on the throne of David they would one day have a monarch who would bring deliverance to the world. The government would be upon his shoulder and he would be called, Wonder of a Counsellor, God-like Hero, and Prince of Peace. In this idea kingship is exalted until it becomes a Divine symbol of God's presence with men. Micah feels, too, that a *man* is wanted, but he is inclined to look elsewhere for him. He has seen enough of kings, princes, diplomats, and politicians. He holds with Isaiah that he will be of the house of David, as expectation had always held, but that fact suggests to him a wonderful idea. After all David was only a peasant, a shepherd lad, bred in a hamlet. He looks to the same quarter to bring forth the Redeemer. He turns to the oppressed peasantry of the country-side and declares that their deliverer is to rise from their midst and be one of themselves, and he goes on to promise that such a man shall be their peace, and that a company of shepherds shall break the power of Assyria.

¶ On the centenary of the birth of George Stephenson there was an imposing demonstration at Newcastle. A vast procession filed through the town, carrying banners in honour of the great engineer. In the procession there was a band of men from his own little village of Wylam who carried a banner bearing the words, 'He was one of us.'

We cannot help thinking here of the fulfilment of this prophecy in Jesus of Nazareth. It is not a fulfilment in detail that we are to look for. Christ's birth at Bethlehem may be only a coincidence. However that may be, it is the fact that the village rather than the city is to produce the Saviour which the prophet emphasizes. Jesus was not a shepherd boy, nor were His followers shepherds, but they were of the same class, common toilers, craftsmen, and fisher folk. Jesus was a peasant's son and Himself a working man; we must never forget that. What if the working-classes of Europe and America were ever to understand Christ? Is it not to some such movement that we are to look for the fulfilment of this prophet's message, and for the fulfilment of the further promise and expectation which Christ has created?

¶ Byam Shaw has painted a picture in which he represents Christ surrounded by a worshipping company composed of the mighty ones of earth: conquerors, kings, and princes. The figure of Christ is depicted in the conventional way, clothed in a white robe and wearing long, golden, parted hair; and then in defiance of every canon of history and art he has represented this figure as carrying a modern carpenter's tool bag!

3. Can Labour redeem the world?

Among the working classes there is being developed a class consciousness, a sense of the aristocracy of labour. They are slowly adopting the doctrine that labour is the sole creator of wealth, and therefore should receive what it creates. At first striving to gain their demands by political methods they have now begun to despair of these methods. Then emerges the idea that since they are so necessary to the public, they are really the people in power; other classes depend upon them. They begin to consider how they can use the power they undoubtedly possess. They conceive of a day when society will be compelled to allow the workers to take over the entire industrial system, which they propose then to organize for the production of necessaries for those who are willing to work, abolishing both wages and profits at one blow.

Is there any hope of a religious fulfilment in such ideas? If there is not, if the opposition of the working classes to Christianity is a rejection of its very essence, then it means that Christianity has no chance with the very class which first made it a power in the world. But we believe that we must look to this very movement to become religious, or despair of religion altogether. We can conceive how the sense of a Divine commission to redeem the world might touch these very classes and bring entirely new principles into operation. Just imagine what would happen if the great proletariat of the civilized world came to believe in God and to follow Christ, because they saw that without a belief in God justice is a vacant hope, and that apart from the way of Christ no kingdom of righteousness can ever be established. Let them conceive that they come to rescue our world from the devastating worship of Mammon, and let their class consciousness be that which seeks to win all others to the same saving way of service. Let them learn their larger brotherhood with all men, and dedicate themselves to the will of God to be His anointed redeemer for the modern age.

¶ In the words of Olaf Devik, a brilliant young member of the Social Democracy of Norway, 'The problem now is to bring the proletariat, the workers of the world, to God and Christ.' Sooner or later Labour, impelled by its incurable need of God, will discover that it cannot do without Him, and must find its way to the

Christ, who not only preaches fellowship and brotherhood among men, but proclaims that this fellowship endures and develops only among those who 'seek first the Kingdom of God.'[1]

They are the only people who can give vitality to religious faith. The theologian and the scholar may have given themselves in recent years to the task of liberating religion. But their work is necessarily more easily turned to destruction than to construction. Mere scholars would often reduce religions to philosophical abstractions and beggarly elements. They are unable to retranslate the simplicity and freedom, which they proclaim to be the essence of faith, into poetic speech and fuller life. Only the common people can do that. The gospel of Christ has never yet been wholly translated into our native tongue.

They are the only people who can save us from the horror of war. We have trained ambassadors and plenipotentiaries at our universities, we have clothed them in dignity and gold lace, we have supported them with prestige and wealth; and they have failed to do anything for decades but terrify Europe with wars and rumours of wars. Now the people must take up their task. As they realize that war is no concern of theirs, that they have no quarrel with any German, Russian, Chinaman, or Turk who labours at producing the necessaries of human life, so they will bring war to an end.

God's Singers

Micah vi. 4.—'I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.'

THE history of the children of Israel, as described in the Hexateuch, is the history of the making of a nation. To make a nation something more than common blood and language is necessary. The rabble of fugitive slaves that fled with Moses from Egyptian bondage had common blood, and at bottom, perhaps, a common tradition of faith. But it would be impossible to describe that undisciplined multitude as in any true sense a nation. Before they could be a nation, and play a nation's part, certain influences must be brought to bear upon them; common beliefs and hopes, sentiments and habits had to be developed. The Israelites furnished no more than the raw material which sympathy and skill might work into a product of stable, resolute, and enthusiastic national life. For so great and difficult a task certain forces were necessary.

1. The function of the *prophet* we see in Moses. Moses, indeed, was something more than a prophet. He was what many prophets were not—eminently practical-minded. He had not only a grasp of high principles, but an equally eminent skill in their application. He was, in short, a great lawyer and a great statesman as well as a great prophet. It was to his genius, and to his genius alone, that that extraordinary Church-State, which existed so long, an absolutely singular and unique feature of the world's life, was due. But he had the prophet instinct and capacity as well. He was one of the elect who are habitually aware of the near reality of a personal God, and who enter into communion and awful familiarity with that unseen presence. What he may have learned of other systems of government in his Egyptian days we do not know. But that he learned his own in solitary meditations, wherein he was conscious that God breathed His counsel into His servant's mind, we have no reason to doubt. Some men have, to a rare degree, this capacity of putting themselves to school with God. Moses had it, and all the line of the prophets. The result is seen in a unique quality of faith, and earnestness of desire that all men should practise more detachment from earthly pursuits and ambitions, and become themselves more conscious of eternal issues. The people that is truly inspired by some prophet voice with thoughts like these will grow in dignity and power, and develop elements of strength which will go far to make it a nation.

2. The *priest*, as Aaron represented him, was the organizer of the religious life; and this organization was of the highest importance and value in dealing with a people which had been thoroughly disorganized and demoralized by long years of servitude to an idolatrous nation. Aaron shares with Moses, though as a subordinate, the glory of having ruled and shaped the course and conduct of his countrymen at a time of unexampled difficulty, pregnant with the highest consequences to the religious future of the world. Samuel, when solemnly reviewing the history of his people, places them thus

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[1] F. B. Macnutt, *From Chaos to God*, 122.

side by side. 'It is the Lord,' he says, 'that advanced Moses and Aaron.' 'Thou leddest thy people,' sings a later Psalmist, 'like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.'

¶ The Priest, as I understand it, is a kind of Prophet; in him too there is required to be a light of inspiration, as we must name it. He presides over the worship of the people; is the Uniter of them with the Unseen Holy. He is the spiritual Captain of the people; as the Prophet is their spiritual King with many captains: he guides them heavenward by wise guidance through this Earth and its work. The ideal of him is, that he, too, be what we can call a voice from the unseen Heaven; interpreting, even as the Prophet did, and in a more familiar manner unfolding the same to men. The unseen Heaven—the 'open secret of the Universe'—which so few have an eye for! He is the Prophet shorn of his more awful splendour; burning with mild, equable radiance, as the enlightener of daily life. This, I say, is the ideal of a Priest. So in old times; so in these, and in all times. One knows very well that, in reducing ideals to practice, great latitude of tolerance is needful; very great. But a Priest who is not this at all, who does not any longer aim or try to be this, is a character—of whom we had rather not speak in this place.[1]

3. But there is a third, whose gifts are from God for the cultivation of a deep and noble national spirit. 'I sent before thee Moses and Aaron, *and Miriam*.' To the prophet and the priest there is added the *poet*, the inspired singer, the lyrist and melodist, whose office and function it is to take the national hopes and aspirations and wed them to music.

Bequeathing honeyed words to Time,
Embalmed in amber of eternal rhyme.

¶ The old Norsemen were terrible, but never so terrible as when there was a saga in their mouths, some uncouth rune, some warrior epic, the spirit of which made the eyes dilate, and woke dangerous fires under granite exteriors. Greater power even than this lies in the rare gift of improvisation. The wandering minstrel who had the art to extemporize some rough ballad, in which the achievements of the past and the expectations of the future had each their place, exercised a spell over men's spirits that even a king could not command. In the East this still survives. Where there is genuine feeling and conviction behind the gift, such men will fire the most miscellaneous crowd with a common zeal, as well as a common faith. No host would march to battle without some such voice to thrill and lead them.

Miriam's gift was not the gift of the prophet: it was the gift of the poet. The prophet was above his audience; he moved for the most part in regions of thought and feeling inaccessible to the common people, and they stood in awe of him, admired and wondered from afar. Miriam's was a far inferior soul to Moses. But Miriam was far nearer to this people; she was more kith and kin with them than he. Her outbursts of song ring with human triumph and exultation. She sang as if the very life-blood of Israel was in her veins: and by her consciousness of that life, and by her interpretation of that life, she made all Israel feel and know that they had a national unity, a national destiny, and a national mission. No one did more than she in the making of this nation.

Her people was a pilgrim people. They had no *patria*—no fatherland. They were but a wandering tribe. Yet she had to inspire these pilgrim spirits with the breath of patriotism; kindle within them the sense of nationality, unity, and Divine destiny. And she did it. She seized upon the manifest Providences of the pilgrimage—those plain events which he who runs might read—and she drew the music out of them; singing them in such perfervid sort that the whole camp yielded to a common enthusiasm, and worshipped a common Divine Saviour and Deliverer. It was what prophet and priest could not do. It was to this great end that God sent before them Miriam. For even when prophet and priest fail to obtain entrance to the heart of a people, to quote Dora Greenwell's words, 'God's singer passeth free.'

4. Let us look now at this subject in its larger scope. Let us ask, what is the part of the singer in the leadership of the people of God, the children of the Kingdom, in the renewal of their hopes, the inspiration of pure ambition, the revival of courage? This is not simply a question of a special and inimitable gift, it is a question of a spirit of life and

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[1] Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, Lect. iv.

service. God wants singers. For all times of difficulty, depression, discouragement, there is no *elixir vitae* like a song. When you cannot drive a weary or demoralized soldiery to victory, you can sing them there.

¶ It is said that when Napoleon was crossing the Alps there came a time when the soldiers were about to give up in despair, beaten by the difficulties and the cold. And then, suddenly, some genius suggested that they should sing the Marseillaise. As soon as the notes of that brave exultant song fell on their ears the soldiers set themselves once more to face the difficulties of the way, with a new strength and courage, and finally conquered—triumphing in the power of a song.

When once the Church begins to lack singers—men and women in whom the exuberant spirit of praise prevails—the priest will not save it, and it may be doubted if even the prophet will galvanize it into effective vitality. It is the timbrel we want to hear. We want to know that some one has enough sense of the goodness and gladness of God to sing and to play out of pure sacred joy. We want to feel ourselves the imperative breath of praise, and be stirred from our indifference by the very joy in another's voice — one who has seen the hand of God, and worshipped exultingly. Where are the singing souls moved by the Spirit of God to lead the Church, not in criticism, not in preaching and teaching, not in organizing and administering, but in praise—in word and life? Moses we know, and Aaron we know, but where is Miriam?

If we want to make a way through dark places we must sing our way through. Those who work in the most difficult spheres need most to handle the timbrel. The soul that sang the gladdest, purest song on earth was His whose lot was the sorest. Jesus Christ was the sweetest singer of Israel. His was the note that never failed nor faltered. From the Sermon on the Mount to the final discourse to His disciples, it was all in one key. God, His God, anointed Him with the oil of gladness above His fellows. He began with happiness, He ended with peace. He is the only prophet, priest, and poet of our religion. He had some stern exacting laws to give us, but He set them all to music. When He spoke of the Father, His speech was song. He took the timbrel, He led the strain of praise, until even the mourning hearts of earth found themselves singing, as if in triumph, and the timid ones grew manful in courage. Do not, then, let us speak of the love of God as if there were not this joy in it. If we would lead in His work, in His service, let us have the spirit of the singer. The conditions of our work may be hard and dark, but let us see to it that all the more the world shall know that the spirit of it is praise and exultant gladness. For we, the followers of the Man of Sorrows, are the followers of the Man of Joy and Peace, transcendent, Divine. And the Father hath sent Him before us that He may lead us into the same peace and joy everlasting.

Fill Thou my life, O Lord my God,
  In every part with praise,
That my whole being may proclaim
  Thy being and Thy ways.

Not for the lip of praise alone,
  Nor e'en the praising heart,
I ask, but for a life made up
  Of praise in every part.

Praise in the common words I speak,
  Life's common looks and tones;
In intercourse at hearth and board
  With my beloved ones.

Not in the temple crowd alone,
  Where holy voices chime,
But in the silent paths of earth,
  The quiet rooms of time.

So shall no part of day or night
  From sacredness be free,
But all my life in every step
  Be fellowship with Thee.[1]

What is Religion?

Micah vi. 8.—'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?'

WHAT is the meaning of the word? There are two definitions, each emphasizing a different aspect of the same thing. Cicero preferred the meaning 'to think back,' to think over again, to reflect on the meaning of life, to recollect—

[1] H. Bonar.

meditation on Divine things. Others, among them St Augustine, like best to define it as meaning 'to rebind,' to tie together, that which unites man to God and to His fellows. One thought runs through both definitions, the idea of a thread on which things are strung, a tie by which life is held together. Recent studies seem to arrive at the same view. More and more, religion is regarded not as one instinct among many, not as a separate faculty or interest having a character of its own, but rather a unity of all interests—an organizing principle among the values of life.

Religion, then, is the tie that binds us, first of all, to God who unites all things into one whole; and, secondly, to our fellow-men in the service of duty and the fellowship of things immortal. If we speak of religious value at all we think of it as the value of values—that which organizes life, giving it unity, purpose, meaning, as over against an impulsive and unreflective existence. Truth, love, and 'that thread of all-sustaining beauty that runs through all and doth all unite,' this is the eternal trinity; and in the deepest faith of humanity these three are one. From earliest time man has felt the tug of this threefold tie which unites him with God, his fellow, and himself, linking his little life with the eternal enterprise.

1. There are many imperfect ideas about religion. Some place it in the understanding, in orthodox notions and opinions, and all the account they can give of their religion is that they belong to this or the other of the sects into which Christendom is unhappily divided. Others place it in outward rites and duties. If they live peaceably with their neighbours, observe the returns of worship, and occasionally extend their hands to the relief of the poor, they think they have sufficiently acquitted themselves. Others, again, put all religion in the affections, in rapturous heats and ecstatic devotion; and all they aim at is to pray with passion, and think of heaven with pleasure. But St James in the New Testament, like Micah in the Old, tells us what religion is in its simplest motive and manifestation. 'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world.' It is not this dogma or that rite, but justice, mercy, humility, and fellowship with God whose Presence inspires and hallows our mortal life. It is benevolence and purity in the sight of God—visiting those in need and keeping ourselves pure in the light of Eternity. Philanthropy, without faith, is feverish and fragile. Fraternity quickly evaporates unless it has the inspiration and consecration of the Unseen. Acts must have motives. Results require causes. We cannot produce a poem by an explosion in a type foundry. Nor can we have an abiding brotherhood among men, much less a noble and fruitful social order, without a subduing and exalting sense of a Divine Presence—a vast and benign background to life whence our motives and acts derive their dignity, meaning and worth.

A last century philosopher defines religion with insight when he says: 'True religion is the union of the soul with God, a real participation of the Divine nature, the very image of God drawn upon the soul; or, in the Apostle's phrase, it is Christ formed within us. Briefly, I know not how the nature of religion can be more fully expressed than by calling it a Divine Life—*the life of God in the soul of man.*'

Jesus never once used the word 'religion,' so far as we have record—perhaps because, in His day, the word was so empty, formal and external—but always the word 'life' instead. He came, He said, that men might have life, and have it more abundantly—life rich, free, sparkling, overflowing, eternal. With Him whatever makes for a deeper, purer, truer, more radiant life is religious; whatever dwarfs, retards, or pollutes life is irreligious. With Him religion did not consist in a few acts, such as prayer, worship, and solemn ritual word, but in the spirit, the faith, the motive and gesture with which we do everything; and to-day we are rediscovering His insight. For the first time men are learning that religion is no mystery or social convention, but a power by which to live the day through more deeply, more bravely, more fruitfully. All things have become religious that have in them the hope of joy and growth; all days are holy which abound in usefulness; all tasks are sacred which bring opportunity and fellowship; and all things are from God which draw men together in good-will and promote justice and beauty in the earth. To-day we see that religion, so far from limiting and spoiling life, shakes the poison out of all our wild flowers, and reveals God in our motives and acts here on earth in every moment of time. Religion is no longer a thing apart from life; it is life itself at its best—the life of God in the soul of man, taking all the forms that love and duty and hope can take. It is 'the love of God, the union of the spirit of man with holiness, the constant endeavour to do the best and bear the worst.' As Emerson puts it, 'religion is the doing of all good, and for its sake the suffering of all evil.' For we must suffer evil. Then formal faith, traditional creed, mere ritual will break down under the pressure of hard experience. Unless we have learned the love of God, and have attained, in some degree, to the might of holiness, it will go ill with us in our hours of difficulty and trial.

Donald Hankey summed up his daring faith in the word 'Religion is just betting your life that there is a God.' It is a risk, an adventure, and the measure of our courage is the measure of our discovery, as Pascal taught in his famous Wager Essay, in which he made the wager that God is. If man acted only on what he knew, no one would stir from the spot. But we do stir. We launch out confidently in all sorts of enterprise. Otherwise, we should never cross a bridge, take a train, or make a friend. Full as life is of the element of adventure, men are not abashed by it, save in the highest matters. Literally, we live by faith every day, and it cannot be unwise to trust the highest we can think or dream. It is the kind of a world we should like to help build—that is what an honest man means to-day by following Christ. Hartley Coleridge described, once for all, the faith that is not only heroic, but redeeming:

Think not the faith by which the just shall live
Is a dead creed, a map correct of Heaven,
Far less a feeling fond and fugitive,
A thoughtless gift, withdrawn as soon as given;
It is an affirmation and an act
That bids eternal truth be present fact.

2. Man is a citizen of two worlds. How often we have heard the expression 'one world at a time,' and that would be wise if it were possible. But it is not, for he cannot live in one at a time without ceasing to be a man. Above us, within us, on all sides, are hints and intimations of a higher, finer world, and religion is the art of living in two worlds at the same time, both of them equally real and each the fulfilment of the other. Men seem to be, seek to be, dwellers in one world, but they never quite succeed. Voices keep calling us from afar, which stir us beyond words.

¶ Out in Canada there is a river with the haunting name of Qu' Appelle, which means Who Calls. The name was given, it is said, because a young Indian brave, ascending the stream to see the maiden whom he loved, was startled, as he wrapped himself in his blanket for the night, to hear his name spoken. 'Who calls?' he answered, but there was no reply. Perturbed, he sank into restless sleep, and the next day he learned that his beloved had died just at the time when he heard his name.

To-day we are much under the spell of a materialism which, if it has its way, will repatriate us out of our immortality. Absorbed in the world that now is, obsessed by it, otherworldliness is taboo, and those who seek to know the Land of the Spirit are called mystics. But that mood will pass. Never, since he became a being 'with face to heaven upturned,' has man been able to feel entirely at home upon the earth. Busy himself as he may, seeking out many inventions, there are times when the solid earth is touched with eerie strangeness, and he is aware that he is a pilgrim. The old homesickness of soul returns, and he pauses to look away into the heavens. Were it otherwise, we should be as the beasts that perish unvisited by 'thoughts that wander through eternity.'

Strange the world about me lies,
  Never yet familiar grown—
Still disturbs me with surprise,
  Haunts me like a face half known.

In this house with starry dome,
  Floored with gemlike plains and seas,
Shall I never feel at home,
  Never wholly be at ease? [1]

3. But religion, so inward and intimate, is not altogether an individual adventure—it is social, communal. In spite of its history as a separating force, at bottom, religion is the tie, the thread, that binds humanity together in fellowship and fraternal righteousness. Religion is the

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[1] William Watson.

primitive thing in humanity. Social thinkers are beginning to see that there is something deeper than economics with which we must reckon. The earliest religious rites were social, not merely utilitarian, but idealistic. They were of two kinds, imitating the processes of Nature, and celebrating the events of family and tribal life—birth, marriage, death. They were communal—nobody tried to observe them alone. If ever we find the secret of creative social evolution it will be in a deeper insight into the nature of religion as the only enduring social bond, the inspiration of all high thought, all great art, all prophetic social engineering. Such is the deeper insight of our day, and it foretells changes in thought, method, and enterprise. Men are coming to see that religion, so far from being a restraining and conserving influence, is also creative, and the inspiration and prophecy of a Divine Society. No brotherhood built on the baseness of human nature can long endure. It is a rope of sand. Jesus lived and wrought in the vision of the Kingdom of Heaven—the vision of the communal redemption of humanity here upon earth; and if we are His disciples we shall watch and work and pray for the realization of

> the dream, the wondrous dream
> Of a world without a seam!
> Man being one, as God is one,
> Brother's brother and Father's son,
> All earth, all Heaven, without a seam.

What God Requires

Micah vi. 8.—'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?'

This sentence has been pronounced 'the greatest saying of the Old Testament.' Whether this be so or not, it is certainly one of the grand and timeless utterances of the true prophetic spirit. It recalls us from the vain ceremonies and professions which the selfish and superstitious soul offers as a substitute for religion, and insists on the deep moral and inward character of God's requirements. 'He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' The religion here urged is no thing of ritual, ceremony or creed, but a thing of life. No splendour of ceremony, no beauty of ritual is acceptable to God when it is offered by those who are unjust in their dealings, untrue in their speech, and unclean in their life. Religion in its final analysis is not a question of forms and ceremonies but of character.

The essentials of a religious life are practical rather than theoretical, and our age is rightly intolerant of churches and creeds which do not influence conduct and create character. It insists that so long as religion remains in the region of mere ritual it ceases to be a vital force, and possesses only a sentimental value. Religion must come to flower and fruit in character and conduct before we can rightly estimate its worth, and assign its place. The Lord Jesus said: 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' He insisted that Christianity not only submits to the test, but invites it.

There are two ways in which men, nowadays, make too much of the non-essentials of religion. There is the *Ritualist*, who exaggerates the importance of ceremonial. And we become ritualists of a sort when we think God's claims are met by church services. The essence of religion is not in that fervid glow contagious in excited assemblies; but in honest dealing, in kind actions, in that obedient spirit which springs from a realization of the presence of God. Its sphere is principally not in the church, but outside—in the world and in the home.

Another way in which some make too much of the non-essentials of religion is *on the side of doctrine*. How often do men say as an excuse for indifference, 'There are so many difficulties in the Bible, difficulties as to its inspiration, as to the Atonement, as to how God answers prayer.' And they speak as if they wanted all these questions settled out of hand before they can serve God. Which is about as reasonable as if a man said, 'I will never use the electric light, I will never send a telegram, because I do not understand the exact nature of electricity.' Or as if he refused to live because biology cannot furnish a complete definition of life. Confessedly there are difficulties in the Bible, but they belong to the intellect and not to practical life. The cases are rare indeed when we need to be in doubt as to how we ought to act, as to what is our duty to God or to our neighbour.

I have a life with Christ to live,
But, ere I live it, must I wait
Till learning can clear answer give
Of this and that book's date?

I have a life in Christ to live,
I have a death in Christ to die;—
And must I wait, till science give
All doubts a full reply?

Nay rather, while the sea of doubt
Is raging wildly round about,
Questioning of life and death and sin,
Let me but creep within
Thy fold, O Christ, and at Thy feet
Take but the lowest seat,
And hear Thine awful voice repeat
In gentlest accents, heavenly sweet,
Come unto Me, and rest:
Believe Me, and be blest.[1]

Let us see what are the essentials of religion, what are the Divine requirements.

1. *To do justly.*—We are often told, and there is a considerable amount of truth in the statement, that the true service of God is in the service of man. Not, that is to say, in sentiment, but in action; and the beginning of this action will surely always be just. The prophets one and all cry for righteousness. God to them was righteousness, the source and fount of it all. And is there not need to-day among Christian people to get them to deal justly by their neighbours? We cannot but have sympathy with those out of work men who declared it was not our charity they wanted, but justice; and if our social state is ever to be set right by Christian people and upon Christian lines it will be through a new and larger conception of the justice we owe to our fellows. What doth the Lord require of us? Surely to do justly as far as we can to our neighbours, and those with whom we come into contact everywhere—our friends, our servants, our employees, the casual people we have dealings with, our enemies! Religion is in that strict scrupulousness of action which is what God asks as a return to Him for His mercy. It is no use to speak about the grace of God in Christ Jesus and prostrate ourselves in gratitude before Him unless our gratitude spells justice to others. That we should harbour no thought of wrong to any, that we should let no unjust, unkind word pass our lips, that we should deal as straightly as we know how in every action of life—that is what is required of us, if our religion is to be the vital force, the practical thing which our Lord means it to be.

¶ In a letter written by the late Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone to the Duchess of Sutherland occurs this passage: 'There is one proposition which the experience of life burns into my soul; it is this, that a man should beware of letting his religion spoil his morality. In a thousand ways, some great, some small, but all subtle, we are all daily tempted to that great sin.'[1]

2. *To love mercy.*—Mercy is often spoken of as the attribute which tempers the severity of justice. It has been defined as 'that benevolence . . . which disposes a person to overlook injuries, or to treat an offender better than he deserves.' The word 'mercy,' however, has in this passage a much wider range of meaning. The Hebrew term is applied to another exalted attribute, which is repeatedly ascribed to God, and translated 'lovingkindness.' And so far are justice and mercy from being regarded as opposites, that they are placed together as though one involved the other. If justice is the foundation of God's throne, mercy goes before His face; if He loveth judgment, 'the earth is full of his lovingkindness.' The term, then, is practically equivalent to Christian love.

But we are required to *love* mercy; for only thus can it become a pervading principle of action. To love mercy is to carry on an active propaganda of delivering those who are overburdened and handicapped, those who are not getting a fair start in their childhood, those who are living under conditions in which it is impossible to have happiness, let alone goodness. It is not a negative but a positive thing. It is something that drives you in your life. It is that you live in an atmosphere of love which makes you active for good to others. When the judge says to Shylock demanding his pound of flesh: 'Then must the Jew be merciful,' Shylock answers, 'On what compulsion must I?' Why should I be forced to be merciful? And then you get one of the most magnificent passages in Shakespeare's plays: 'The quality of mercy is not strained, it droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven.' It is not a thing that you take up and say, I will be merciful. It must be like the all-pervading dew on the grass, it must be in the atmosphere of the mind, it must be woven into our nature; our mercy must be a quality of our character, because we love mercy, and mercy of a positive kind. We love to be doing things to raise up them that fall and to beat down Satan, with all his tormenting evils, under the feet of humanity.

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[1] J. C. Shairp.

[1] S. J. Hoban, *The Great Realities*, 153.

¶ Is there any lovelier story told of any English man of letters than that of Dr Johnson putting pennies into the shut hands of little children whom he found sleeping at night in doorways in the Strand, that when they woke they might think some angel of mercy had visited them? So small is the price at which our best things are bought — miracles for sixpence![1]

We bring no ghastly holocaust,
  We pile no graven-stone;
He serves Thee best who loveth most
  His brothers and Thine own.

3. *To walk humbly with thy God.*—Religion, to be practical must not only be ethical and emotional, but also deeply spiritual. Surely Huxley was justified in saying all religion was really summed up in this sentence. Our return to God for His benefits is to be expressed not in sentiment, not in the idle lifting of worshipping hands, but in a life made holy, beautiful and strong by Divine grace, and the best expression of this is surely in the phrase, ‘walk humbly with thy God.’

How far have we learned to fulfil that part of God’s requirements? Is there not, about nearly all of us, something of the sense of the old Pharisee: ‘Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other men are’? Now the beginning of all real religion is in penitence, in the sense that all is not well with us, in the sense that we have deserved nothing at the Lord’s hands. That comfortable, easy-going, complacent, half-dogmatic feeling that we are all right is like dry rot at the root of our lives and at the root of our Churches. It is well for us to put on one side everything that would seem to justify us in the sight of God. It is well for us to take up the only attitude that a man can take up in the presence of the Almighty—the attitude which would drive us to prostrate ourselves and cry, Unclean! It is out of that sense of utter humility before God that real worship always arises. ‘To walk humbly with thy God’—to keep thy head bowed before Him, to be still in His presence. ‘To walk humbly with thy God’—the sense that God is so great, and His requirements so immense, and His holiness so pure that we ourselves are as nothing in His sight. We need to enlarge considerably our view of God, our sense of His holiness, our sense of His requirements upon us, our sense of utter indebtedness, our belief in grace, that we may take up the only true attitude and walk humbly in His presence.

It is enough, if, at the close of day,
Thou resting wearied limbs, canst truly say,
I have walked humbly with my God this day:—
  It is enough.

What does the Lord require of us? What is our answer to God’s appeal? What kind of lives are we living? What about the reality of our penitence? Surely the object of all religious teaching and the aim of all religious living should be just this doing of the will of God, this living of the life of God, this setting ourselves in true relationship to God.

¶ Most of us have read that very beautiful letter which the saintly Bishop of Lincoln wrote to his people on his death-bed. To look into his face was a benediction, because one saw there manifestly the glow of a real holiness and a very deep penitence. One of his last words was this: ‘I have always tried to help you to live more Christlike lives.’

The Incomparable Lord

Micah vii. 18, 19.—‘Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.’

These words, uttered by Micah as the crown of his prophecy, were spoken at a time when the state of Israel was as bad as it well could be. Idolatry and apostasy from God had resulted in moral deterioration, and the picture which the prophet draws of the state of the people is dark in the extreme. Sin is not only written in the book of judgment, but is faithfully recorded also in the character and outward life alike of the nation and of the individual. Moral deterioration is always a record of heart-alienation from God.

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[1] G. Jackson, *A Parson’s Log*, 183.

It is remarkable that amid so much darkness and corruption Micah himself should have caught such a vision of the ultimate victory of the love of God as these words describe. All around him the contest seems to be unequal, and evil seems to be triumphant. But his own heart is passionately set upon righteousness, and hence he alone of all men in his day could discern the unchangeable God. It is always the case that 'He that willeth to do his will shall know of the doctrine.' No man ever sets his heart to do the right, to follow the gleam of awakened conscience, and to be true to the moral instincts of his life, who is not unerringly led by that same light to God's Holy Hill and to His dwelling-place.

1. Mark well the prophet's claim on behalf of God. He ascribes to Him absolute uniqueness—'Who is a God like unto thee?' He is incomparable, for none can do as He does in just this very matter of dealing effectually with the problem of sin. The fact of His ability to forgive removes the Lord far beyond the sphere of comparison. Forgiveness is contrary to the nature of all things with which we are acquainted. It is impossible for Nature to forgive a breach of her own laws. If, for instance, we disregard any of the laws of health, punishment inevitably follows. Nature shows no mercy, and forgiveness is a term which does not exist in her vocabulary. The same, too, is to be said for society and the world in general. If a man breaks the law of the land the world never quite forgives him; even though he atone for his transgression it is always brought up to him again, and he bears the stigma of it to the end of his days. The shrug of the shoulders, the curl of the lip, the inflexion of the voice which are apparent on all hands when his name is mentioned testify to the unforgiving spirit of the human society. To narrow the circle down to one's own personal life is to be made conscious that memory, too, never forgives. It is tyrannous in its grip upon us, bringing up again and again faults committed and repented of long ago. But what is impossible to nature, to man, and to memory, is blessedly possible to God. The Pharisees were nearer the right than they knew when they said, 'Who can forgive sins but God only?' and this, their taunting sneer, has become the triumphant song of His people. For the forgiveness which Micah and a host of others also proclaimed in the dim dawning of Old Testament revelation was procured by Jesus, and 'through this Man is now preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.' His incarnation and atonement, His life and His death, were the crowning proofs of the forgiveness of God, which like a great stream of love flowed and still flows toward those whose sin has most wronged Him.

Great God of wonders! All Thy ways
  Are worthy of Thyself—Divine;
But the bright glories of Thy grace
  Beyond Thine other wonders shine.
    Who is a pardoning God like Thee,
    And who has grace, so rich and free?

2. How complete is the forgiveness of which God alone is capable is to be understood by His casting 'all their sins into the depths of the sea.' Perhaps Micah was thinking of what happened to Pharaoh and his host. Perhaps he was remembering the Song of Triumph on that day of Israel's deliverance: 'The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone.' 'Who is like unto thee, O Lord, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?'

No other figure employed for the illustration of truth conveys so eloquently the fact that with God forgiveness and forgetfulness are one. Into that ocean there comes no tide, and the wreckage of forgiven lives can never be washed up upon the beach to accuse or condemn. Its unsounded depths are known only to Him, and He does not share the secret of His knowledge.

¶ 'I never had quite a full sense of the meaning of this word,' says Dr Stuart Holden, 'until when travelling across the Atlantic recently a passenger died, and to the sound of muffled bell was committed to the deep. Nothing to mark his grave, gone out of sight for ever, and beyond the power of man to recover, it seemed a solemn picture of a glad fact, for just so does God bury our sins in the sea of His own forgetfulness.'

3. But forgiveness, while it is the initial letter of the Divine alphabet, does not by

itself spell the whole truth. It is as the foundation upon which the superstructure of salvation rests, and the further fact of His power to 'subdue all our iniquities' substantiates the claim of uniqueness. Forgiveness does not of necessity change a man's character or nature. The pardoned thief is not thereby made honest, nor the forgiven drunkard thereby made sober, though in each case forgiveness is but the prelude in God's purpose to a moral change and a new life. He is not only 'faithful and just to forgive us our sins,' but also 'to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' Forgiveness deals only with the past, and what the forgiven soul most needs is power for the present and future. This God can and does bestow. 'Liberty to the captives' is in the forefront of the Saviour's programme, and deliverance from the power of sin is the promised experience of all those who trust and yield to Him. He breaks the power of old enslavement, and leads men out of bondage into the glorious liberty of the people of God.

A liberty
Which monarchs cannot grant, nor all the powers
Of earth and hell confederate take away,
Which whoso tastes can be enslaved no more—
The liberty of heart derived from heaven.

And this He does, not by the imposition of external restraint, but by the impartation of new life and power. The gospel is not a mere system of sanction and prohibition, a code of 'do' and 'don't,' but a charter of freedom, and it is by the expulsive power of new affection that real deliverance is effected. He who forgives establishes also and maintains within us a heart-correspondence with Himself, so that we increasingly love the things which He loves, hate the things which He hates, and desire to reach the ideals which He sets before us. And there is none other that can deliver after this sort.

THE BOOK OF NAHUM

INTRODUCTION

The theme of the brief but passionate prophecy of Nahum is the impending fall of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. If we would read it with sympathy, indeed without revulsion, we must realize what the name of Nineveh meant to the world of the prophet's day, and what frightful atrocities the Assyrian had wrought among the nations. For this we do not need to depend on the testimony of her enemies. Her own artists, in the series of pictures with which they adorned the palaces of her kings, have preserved and published to all ages Nineveh's undying shame.

I

Egypt had been an empire for millenniums but Assyria was comparatively an upstart, and, compared with the Assyrian, the Egyptian was a gentleman. Pharaoh might be hard of heart, but the Assyrian king was a beast. A conquered city might hope for mercy at Pharaoh's hand though the terms might be severe, but to fall into the clutches of the Assyrian was to endure all that devilish lust and cruelty could devise. The Assyrian army was a horde of disciplined savages whose chief delights were to plunder, ravish, and torture. With his own hand their king would gouge out the eyes of noble captives, then perhaps flay them alive and peg them to the ground to perish. When on the warpath, as his palace sculptures show, he would dine with the bleeding heads of his enemies hung up in front of him to whet his appetite. He spread the terror of his name over Asia. In Isaiah's phrase, his boast was that he plundered the wealth of nations as one would harry a bird's nest, and none dared to flutter a wing or chirp. He tore the peoples from home and country and mixed them together indiscriminately, so that all patriotism might be quenched.

The Assyrian empire reached the summit of its power about 663 B.C., when Ashurbanipal overran Egypt as far as the cataracts of the Nile, and sacked and utterly destroyed its capital, Thebes, in the usual savage way. This magnificent city, Homer's 'hundred-gated Thebes,' whose fame reaches back to the dawn of history, was utterly laid waste. To this dire event the prophet Nahum refers (iii. 8–10), telling how 'her little ones were dashed to pieces at every street corner,' and predicting that a similar fate will befall her destroyer. For this the nations had not long to wait. Five hundred years it had taken Assyria to climb to the summit; in fifty years she fell. A new power, the Medes, arose in the east and pressed hard on Assyria. When Babylon revolted and joined forces with them, the doom of Nineveh was sealed. The old lion was attacked in his own lair, and although he defended himself savagely he was overthrown. Nineveh was utterly wiped out. Two centuries later, when Xenophon passed the spot with the immortal Ten Thousand, the very name of Nineveh was forgotten, and there only lingered a tradition that a great and impregnable city had once stood there, but 'Zeus made its inhabitants senseless, and so it was taken.' A shapeless and nameless mound, it lay desolate until, less than a century ago, it was rediscovered and laid bare by the explorer's spade.

II

Nineveh fell about 608–606 B.C., and to the years preceding this date the prophecy of Nahum is to be ascribed. The reference in chap. iii. to the destruction of Thebes or No-Ammon indicates a date subsequent to that event. We cannot with any certainty be more precise, for Nineveh was threatened for years before it fell. It was first besieged by the Medes in 625, and some would assign Nahum's book to that time. Others prefer the years immediately preceding the final overthrow. The difference in years is not great and has no vital bearing on the interpretation of the book.

Of the prophet himself we know nothing except that he is designated 'the Elkoshite,' which signifies that he was a native of Elkosh. This does not help us much, as four sites have been suggested for Elkosh. (1) A tradition not going beyond the sixteenth century places it at the Christian village of Alkush, not far from Nineveh, where Nahum's tomb is shown. If this were authentic, then the prophet would be one of the exiles of the Ten Tribes carried captive by Assyria. (2) Elkosh has been identified with Capernaum, which is taken to mean 'the town of Nahum.' (3) Another Galilean village, Elkozeh, was suggested by Jerome. (4) The most probable site is indicated in an ancient tradition, given in the *Lives of the Prophets*, that 'Nahum was from Elkosh in the country beyond Beth-Gabre of the tribe of Simeon.' This would put his birthplace halfway between Jerusalem and Gaza.

His book is a short, impassioned utterance, showing great powers of imagination and of lofty poetic diction. In this respect it most nearly approaches Isaiah. Its unity was unquestioned until some scholars remarked on the traces of an acrostic poem discernible in the first chapter. This has led some to endeavour to reconstruct this poem, but such reconstructions, as Professor A. B. Davidson has said, 'can never be more than an academic exercise.' There is, however, a distinct difference to be noted between chapter one and the rest of the book. It gives a picture of Jehovah in the awfulness of His holy wrath against iniquity, which is the sure pledge of the overthrow of all His enemies. Relying on this the prophet makes bold to utter his word against Nineveh. 'Ch. i. 2–10 sets up the throne of the awful Judge of nations; vv. 11–15 declare the sentence He pronounces on the great criminal at His bar; then chs. ii. and iii. describe the execution of the sentence, which already begins to take effect—iii. 19 reiterating his crime at the conclusion.'

This little book ranks as among the finest things in Hebrew literature. Pusey speaks of its 'grandeur, energy, power, and vividness,' and these must be obvious to every reader. 'The unity of conception, the artistic handling of the theme, the wealth of metaphor and brilliance of description, the firm, swift movement, the vehemence of passion held in strict control which animates the poem, make themselves felt through the faulty text and the veil of translation.' The picture of the siege and sack of Nineveh reads almost like the work of an eyewitness. The besiegers draw their lines round the doomed city; their horses gallop and their war-chariots rattle on the plain; the water-gates are captured; Nineveh's mercenary population begins to vanish like locusts taking wing in the morning. Now the walls are breached and the enemy is in the city, hacking and slaying till the streets are piled with corpses. The wild beast's den is ravaged, and Nineveh perishes with all the accompaniments of brutality which she has inflicted on others. The prophet has no word of pity; his only reflection is that God is just.

III

It has been said that 'in Nahum, a representative of the old narrow and shallow prophetism finds its place in the Canon of Scripture,' and that his point of view is identical with that of the so-called 'false-prophets.' This is to criticize without imagination or sympathy. No doubt an altogether higher note is struck in the Book of Jonah, but Nahum's is the voice of tortured and outraged humanity. He gloats, indeed, over the fall of Nineveh, but it is Nineveh as the incarnation of all evil and the arch-enemy of all mankind. When the first Zeppelin was brought down in flames over London a mighty shout of triumph rose from all the city. A Christian minister joined in the shout, till his wife, who stood by his side, touched his arm and said, 'Hush, they're dying,' whereupon the shout died upon his lips. The people of London were not savages though they thus shouted. To their imagination at the moment that Zeppelin was but a fiery dragon of the sky, an inhuman monster of destruction, itself deserving to be utterly destroyed. Such was Nineveh to the prophet Nahum, such was the mystic Babylon to the seer in Patmos, and their visions carry a message of hope to God's true people in every age, and especially in evil times. They bring the assurance that right shall not forever be on the scaffold and wrong forever on the throne; but, however the judgment of the world may tarry, He who in the past has often 'put down the mighty from their seats' will at last bring every power of evil to the ground, so that His redeemed shall lift up their final triumph-shout, 'O enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end.'

J. H. Morrison

The Character of God

Nahum i. 7.—'The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.'

This little Book of Nahum tells the graphic story of 'the decline and fall' of Nineveh, that great world-power, with its seething population, with its flaming greed of gain, and with its vast trading arm stretching out to grasp the treasures of the earth. The prophet sees her now besieged by the armies of the Medes and Babylonians, and he exults at the thought of her approaching destruction. 'O Judah, celebrate thy feasts for the wicked one will never again pass through thee, she is to be utterly cut off. Woe to the city soaked with blood, home of falsehood and robbery, the Lord is about to demolish her for the wide havoc and misery she has wrought.' And he stands imagining the scene; the furious attack with flash of steel and thunder of battering-ram, the frantic futile struggle to defend the walls, the breaking through and swarming in of the victorious assailants, the panic, the rout, the conflagration of the royal palaces, the multitude of the slain. There is no note of pity in Nahum's rhythmic shout. His fervid patriotism destroys all sense of the brotherhood of humanity. Yet we must remember that the prophet hated the Assyrian, not as being offensive to himself personally, but as the desolator and enemy of his country and his God.

By the doom of Nineveh Nahum taught men to see, in letters of lightning flashed on an ebon sky, the words '*God is just.*' There is a 'power in the world making for righteousness.' The God of Nahum is no Absentee Deity, aloof and apathetic, dwelling afar off in a distant heaven. The prophet's phraseology describes the extraordinary aliveness of the eternal God: 'The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet': 'the mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned in his presence!' But come nearer still. 'The Lord is furious: the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries'; 'Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?' We may call that anthropomorphic, if we will. At any rate, it is a real and not a painted God, and it has a moral relevancy to real men and moral needs. In the very next verse there is such a message as we love to find. 'The Lord is good: a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.' We all feel the soft graciousness of the words. And how violent the contrast! 'The Lord is furious!' That is like the terrible flame of Vesuvius. 'The Lord is good!' That is like the luxurious vines which clothe its lower slopes. But the flame and the vine are from the same mountain, and the fury and the goodness are of the same God. If there were no fury there could be no goodness: if there were no holiness there could be no grace. If God were never angry He could never love. If God can trifle with sin He is neither holy nor good. If God cannot be angry with Nineveh there is no 'great white throne,' and moral sovereignty is destroyed. But there are two words of the Lord, as spoken by the lips of His prophet, which express the Divine attitude to sin in ways which we can never forget, and they are these: 'I am against thee!' 'I will make thy grave.' Evil contains within itself the seeds of inevitable decay. Only goodness lasts.

'The Lord is good. He is a refuge in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust him.' These words are among the most beautiful in the Bible, and they are all the more beautiful because of the grim environment in which they are found. They come upon the reader like a burst of sunshine in a cloudy day.

1. The first principle they lay down is the great ethical postulate of the Old Testament, that God is good. One of the Psalmists had stated that before; but then he had limited it somewhat in its sweep. 'Truly God is good to Israel,' he had said, '*and to such as are of a clean heart.*' But Nahum makes no such limitation. 'God is good,' he proclaims, thus abolishing the unclean deities of heathen mythologies as nonentities, creations of the imagination, that have no other reality than the evil heart of man. God is not like that; 'God is good.'

To us who live under the light of the Christian revelation this seems a commonplace. We have been taught from our earliest years that God is love. But it was not so to the prophet. Living in an age of cruelty and rapine, seeing the wicked triumph, watching the glory of the Assyrian conqueror as he strode over the world leaving misery and death behind him, it was hard to believe that the power at the heart of things was a benignant power, that the 'all-knowing' and the 'all-powerful' was the 'all-loving' too. It is the glory of Nahum that, in an age of travail and sorrow such as his nation had never known, in an age when his family were probably exiled and his homestead perhaps in far-off Galilee was ruined and lost, he was able to say, 'God is good.'

To be able to say it in like circumstances; to hold on to this cardinal article of the Christian creed—this is surely the foundation of all things. The moral quality of God is the essential characteristic of Christianity. There have been religions whose ultimate conception is that God is great, that He is wise, or that He is inscrutable and mysterious. We insist that, while all these are important, the one thing necessary for us is to be sure, and to remain sure, that He is good.

¶ As Jess says in Barrie's romance, 'Aince a body's sure o' that, they're sure o' all.'

The character of man is important, but the character of God is much more important. Our first duty is not to do good, it is not even to be good; it is to be sure that God is good. The most deadly danger of our time is the moral scepticism which belittles the importance of righteousness and sin. If all that we call goodness is but an expedient for keeping man and society in order, and has no ultimate worth in it, then the beauty of holiness is but a matter in the same class as the colours on a butterfly's wings, and the majesty of law has about the same ultimate importance as the protective spots in a beetle's back. The certainty of the ultimate worth of goodness is of the most fundamental importance. It has been the habit of the Church to address its God as One in 'knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life'—not 'in obedience to whom.' The Church has found its eternal life in knowing that all that it taught men to strive for is part of the character of the eternal God. This is the greatest revelation of the Bible, the supreme message of Jesus.

¶ Stevenson's faith is of the kind which rests on the goodness of God. His belief in God was so far removed from any reasoned metaphysical conclusion, that we have described it as the highest form of a spirituality which belongs rather to the Religion of Sentiment than to the Religion of Dogma. Yet that instinctive belief was none the less a part of real knowledge. It is because, in the depths, he is sure that God is good, that he is able to face the life of action and of character strenuously. Indeed, the thought of God is for him so identified with hope and brightness, that when he hears the *Miserere* performed in Noyon Cathedral, he is constrained to say that he takes it to be the work of an atheist. 'I could bear a *Miserere* myself,' he goes on, 'having had a good deal of open-air exercise of late; but I wished the old people somewhere else. It was neither the right sort of music nor the right sort of divinity for men and women who had come through most kind of accidents by this time, and probably have an opinion of their own upon the tragic element in life. A person up in years can generally do his own *Miserere* for himself; although I notice that such an one often prefers *Jubilate Deo* for his ordinary singing.'[1]

2. The second thought in Nahum's great message is, the spiritual defence which such a faith imparts to him who possesses it. 'He is,' continues Nahum, 'a strong hold in the day of trouble.'

Life is not all made up of summer days. There come days of wintry experience, when we need such a defence, if ever we are to weather life's storms without disaster or disgrace. A day comes that can be fitly described, in Joel's words, as 'a day of clouds and thick darkness.' The trouble is not an imaginary trouble, but a very real one; not a vaguely-felt uneasiness, or an intangible phantom, but an actual and unmistakable thing;—a sickness threatening death to oneself or to some one very dear; the loss of property, meaning possible starvation; or the burden of the mystery of life. And this, reacting on the mind, makes us say, 'O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me.'

In such times of critical strain and trial to ourselves, amid changes in our days which make us feel as if there were nothing steadfast, let this be our confidence: 'The eternal God is thy refuge'—'thy Refuge' from the world without and the tumults of thine own spirit;

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[1] J. Kelman, *The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 265.

'thy Refuge' from all the dark shadows which haunt thee, from sleepless, tormenting memories of evil done, and from all invisible terrors; 'thy Refuge' when thy thoughts baffle thee and thy faith fails thee; 'thy Refuge' from all mortal changes and ills, from the loneliness of life, and in the hour of thy final passion and conflict. Not from God do we require to be protected here or hereafter. He Himself is our protection. Other refuge is not needed. 'My God shall supply all your need.' His mercy is unfailing, and His Fatherhood eternal. In our littleness and lowliness, in our sorrow and sin, we are the objects of an infinite care, and in His hands we can receive only good, even though that good may come by means of the severest discipline.

If all my years were summer, could I know
What my Lord means by His 'made white as snow'?
If all my days were sunny, could I say,
'In His fair land He wipes all tears away'?
If I were never weary could I keep
Close to my heart, 'He gives His lovèd sleep'?
Were no graves mine, might I not come to deem
The life eternal but a baseless dream?
My winter, yea, my tears, my weariness,
Even my graves may be His way to bless;
I call them ills, yet that can surely be
Nothing but good that shows my Lord to me.

'Be thou our arm every morning,' says another prophet, 'our salvation also in the time of trouble.' Without that arm to protect how many of us would go down, alas! how many do go down into the depths of Atheism or blank despair, as we have known some do; or, worse still, into the whirlpool of sensuality and shame, without hope because without God in the world.

3. How shall we reach such an anchorage of salvation in our 'day of trouble'? The answer is by simple trust. 'He knoweth,' says the prophet, 'them that trust in him.'

'He knoweth'—the word means 'knows with love and solicitude.' It is the knowledge of which the Psalmist speaks when he says, 'What is man, that thou *takest knowledge* of him?' It is a gracious, loving, caring knowledge, and so Dr Moffatt translates it. 'He careth for them that trust in him.' God cares for all His creatures; but He has a special loving care for those who trust in Him. Faith is here, as elsewhere in the Bible, the great condition of entering into the riches of God's love and grace.

¶ Surely those men are mad who in their little day reject the offerings of religion, for through faith the communion of the creature with his Maker is real and possible to him who seeks it. . . . Thus, then, poor sinner though I am, trustfully as a wearied child that, at the coming of the night, creeps to its mother's knee, do I commit my spirit to the comfort of those Everlasting Arms that were and are its support through all the fears of earth.[1]

How, then, shall such a trust become ours? The prophet came to this through the pathway of a great experience—the experience of God in history stepping forth on behalf of His people to deliver them. Such a cosmic revelation of God may not be ours. But there are other experiences in the individual life that come to us all. The bush still burns with fire to the seeking, expectant soul. God speaks to us to-day in the monitions of conscience. He speaks to us in the still small voice of Love, in the voice of Christ.

That is our vision of God—something better far than the red cohorts of the Medes treading down the enemy—the revelation of a God who 'when he suffered threatened not; when he was reviled, reviled not again but committed his soul unto him that judgeth righteously.'

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[1] H. Rider Haggard, *The Days of My Life.*

THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

INTRODUCTION

I

The Literary Problem

Short as it is, the Book of Habakkuk bristles with critical questions. These turn partly on the prayer in ch. iii., which is now generally recognized to be a late psalm of deliverance marked with liturgical and musical notes—'For the chief musician,' 'On stringed instruments,' 'Set to Shigionoth' (?), and Selah—which adapt it for use in the public worship of the Temple. The main problem, however, concerns the relation of i. 5–11 to their context. The preceding verses, i. 2–4, if taken in their natural sense, refer to acts of injustice and crime within the community of Israel; to punish the wrongdoers, according to i. 5–11, the Chaldeans are about to be raised up by Jehovah; but in the immediate sequel, i. 12–17, the Chaldeans are depicted as already in the full tide of conquest, and the prophet utters a fierce protest against their intolerable violence and cruelty. Various attempts have been made to force the discordant elements into harmony. The boldest is that of Budde, who transposes i. 5–11 to follow ii. 4, and identifies the oppressors of i. 2–4, with the Assyrians, against whom, in his view, the Chaldeans are raised up as the instruments of Divine justice. The transposition of the verses is accepted by Sir George Adam Smith, who, however, inclines to identify the oppressors with the Egyptians. More recently, Duhm has propounded the novel theory that the prophecy as a whole is a challenge directed against the savagery of the campaigns of Alexander the Great, though in support of his theory he is compelled to alter *Kasdim* (the Chaldeans) into *Kittim* (the Cyprians, or Greeks). Accepting the text as it stands, Wellhausen and other scholars regard i. 5–11 as a fragment from an older prophet which Habakkuk has woven into the texture of his own prophecy. This suggestion appears to the present writer to guide us on the right lines towards a solution of the problem. He is disposed, however, to treat i. 2–11 as a single prophecy, bearing on the moral situation in Judah during the reign of Jehoiakim, somewhere about the year 605 B.C., when Nebuchadrezzar and his Chaldeans began to loom large on the horizon of history, and to regard vv. 12 ff, as a later prophecy, dating at the earliest just after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., but more probably towards the middle of the Exile, when the true character of the Chaldeans had been revealed to the world. If Habakkuk's ministry covered so long a period of time, he may have been the author of both sections. But whether he has combined two distinct prophecies of his own, or quotes the words of some earlier prophet, his characteristic message belongs to the *milieu* of the Exile. Habakkuk will then have been one of those loyal hearts who helped to keep alive the faith of their people through those years of darkness and depression when it was strained to the breaking-point. This conclusion is borne out to a certain extent by the Jewish tradition, embodied in the story of *Bel and the Dragon*, which associates him with Daniel, the hero of the Exile.

II

The Prophecies of Habakkuk

The Book of Habakkuk opens amid scenes of injustice and oppression, violence and destruction. It seems to the prophet, indeed, as if the Law has been utterly paralysed, and justice perverted. So he asks, in a tone almost of petulance, 'O Lord, how long must I cry, and thou wilt not hear? How long must I complain to thee of violence, and thou wilt not help?' (i. 2–4). In answer to his cry, Jehovah assures him that He is about to raise up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous nation, from whom judgment and destruction go forth, to take full vengeance on the transgressors (i. 5–11). But under the tyranny of the Chaldeans more grievous wrongs now darken the earth. Not content with exacting judgment for Israel's sins, in sheer lust of blood they slaughter nations without ceasing, as a fisherman slaughters the helpless victims of his net. So Habakkuk uplifts his poignant appeal to heaven: 'Art not thou from of old, Jehovah, my Holy God, who diest not? Thou didst appoint them for judgment, and didst ordain them as ministers of chastisement! Yet thou art too pure of eyes to behold wickedness, and thou canst not look upon wrong-doing. Why, then, dost thou look upon the unjust deeds of faithless men, and why art thou silent when the wicked swallow up those that are more righteous than themselves?' (i. 12–17). Having raised his appeal, the prophet takes his stand on the watch-tower of vision, and waits to see what Jehovah will say to him, and what answer He will make to his complaint. In due time he receives the answer in the shape of a vision which he is directed to write on tablets, in clear bold letters, so that one may read it running, a vision whose fulfilment may be delayed, but for whose coming he is encouraged to wait with patience, for it will not fail: 'Behold, the soul of him that is not upright shall faint away in him;[1] but the righteous shall live by his faithfulness' (ii. 1–4).

The rest of the chapter consists of a series of woes levelled against the Chaldean oppressor. In the first of these he is denounced as a proud and treacherous man, who enlarges his appetite like Sheol, and is insatiable as death, who gathers to himself all nations, and assembles to himself all peoples, only to hear them raise a taunt-song against him as a debtor who has been enriching himself with what is not his own, and will soon be called upon by his creditors to pay them to the last farthing (ii. 5–8). In the second he is warned of the fate of him who fills his house with unjust gain, and must one day forfeit his life for it; 'for the stone from the wall shall cry out, and the beam from the rafter shall answer it' (ii. 9–11). In the third he is likened to a man that builds a city with bloodshed, and founds a town on crime, to discover in the end that 'the peoples have been exhausting themselves for the fire, and the nations wearing themselves out for naught' (ii. 12–14); and in the fourth to one who gives his neighbour drink, that he may gaze on his shame, to find that the cup from Jehovah's right hand shall pass round to him in turn, and shame shall come on his glory (ii. 15–17). A final woe is reserved for the idolater, who says to a piece of wood, 'Awake!' and to a dumb stone, 'Arise!' Can a thing like that give oracles? Though it be overlaid with gold and silver, there is no breath at all in the midst of it. 'But Jehovah is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him' (ii. 18–20).

III

The Prayer of Habakkuk

The psalm in ch. iii. is 'a lyric ode, which for sublimity of poetic conception and splendour of diction, ranks with the finest which Hebrew poetry has produced.'[1] The Psalmist has both heard of and seen the doings of Jehovah in days gone by; and now in the midst of the years He prays him once more to reveal His saving power to His people. In answer to the prayer, Jehovah comes from Mount Sinai—His glory covering the heavens, and His praise filling the earth—riding on His victorious chariots, with a brilliance like fire under Him, and rays of light at His side, pestilence marching before Him, and plague stalking at His heels, making the earth to shake where He stands, and the mountains to quake where He looks, treading the sea with His horses, and cleaving the land into rivers, causing even the sun to forget its rising, and the moon to stay still in its dwelling-place, as He uncovers His bow, fills His quiver with arrows, and sends them flashing like light on the enemies of His people, piercing them through the head, and scattering their warriors like chaff, dashing in pieces the house of the wicked, and laying bare its foundations even to the rock. So awful is the sight that the psalmist's whole body trembles, his lips quiver, mouldering enters his bones, and his steps totter beneath him, as he waits for the day of trouble to come on the people that has invaded his land (iii. 2–16).

The psalm is rounded off by a sweet song of peace and confidence which has inspired Christian hymns in various languages. Though the fig-tree bear no fruit, and there be no yield on the vines; though the produce of the olive fail, and the fields bring forth no food; though the flock be cut off from the fold, and no cattle be found in the stalls; yet the singer will exult in Jehovah, he will rejoice in the God of his salvation; for Jehovah, the Lord, is his strength; He makes his feet like hinds' feet, and causes him to walk on his heights (iii. 17–19).

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[1] This rendering, which is based on the text of a number of MSS., gives a more appropriate sense than the usual version.

[1] Driver, *Introduction*, p. 317.

IV

The Message of Habakkuk

With Habakkuk we enter upon a new phase of prophecy. The earlier prophets had denounced the sins of their people from the Olympian heights of their assurance that they were the spokesmen of Jehovah. Their words were 'oracles of Jehovah,' heralded by the solemn formula, 'Thus saith Jehovah.' Habakkuk had as keen a conviction as any of his predecessors that sin brings suffering and death upon the sinner. But the facts of life seemed often to belie his conviction. As he brooded over this problem he dared to challenge the Divine government of the world. Why, he asked, did Jehovah look on silently when injustice and violence were rampant on the earth? Above all, why did He allow the wicked to make havoc of those that were more righteous than themselves? Not till he had wrestled with God in the watch-tower of conscience, as earnestly as Jacob had wrestled with Him at Jabbok, did he find an answer to his questions. And the answer came, as we have seen, in the form of a vision of the destinies of human life as they work themselves out in the alembic of character. 'Behold, the soul of him that is not upright shall faint away in him; but the righteous shall live by his faithfulness.' The wicked man has the seeds of death implanted in his soul, and these seeds will bring forth their inevitable fruit. Even now, in the pride of his triumphs, he is dying of spiritual decline; and sooner or later his soul will ebb out of him. This side of the vision is abundantly illustrated in the woes which immediately follow, where by various metaphors it is shown that 'tyranny is suicide.'[1] On the other hand, the character of the righteous man has in it the principle of permanence. His soul is rooted in God Himself. Thus he lives the life that is life indeed. Even when he is beset by trials and dangers, he dwells in the sunshine of God's favour, he enjoys the bliss of a good conscience, and he has strength to endure to the end. In the prophet's words, he lives by his 'faithfulness,' that is, his loyalty to God and duty, his moral steadfastness, his integrity.

Habakkuk's brave words have left their impress on the song of confidence which ends the prayer in ch. iii., and find an echo also in the Book of Job and in the Problem Psalms, xvi., xxxvii., and lxxiii. Here, too, moral steadfastness is the anchor of life. All else may be lost; but the man who trusts in God and holds fast his integrity, he who has God at his right hand and follows the true pathway of life, shall never be moved. Through the Septuagint the words have passed into the Christian Church as well, and have become the keynote of St Paul's doctrine of justification by faith (Rom. i. 17, Gal. iii. 11), of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews' exhortation to patience (Heb. x. 37 f.), and of Luther's triumphant assertion of Christian freedom. In all of them, no doubt, the words have received a new turn of meaning, 'faith' being used in the special sense of trust in God's redeeming grace through Jesus Christ. Yet the loyalty to God on which Habakkuk insisted is a vital element in this trust. The prophet is, therefore, to be honoured as one of the brightest of that shining band through whom the light of faith broadened unto the perfect day.

Alex. R. Gordon

The Worship of the Net

Hab. i. 16.—'Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag.'

The bold metaphor of the text is that of a fisherman whose mind is so overborne by the large draughts of fish which he is continually taking, that he begins actually to worship the nets which are the instruments of such wonderful success. Under this figure the prophet is portraying the Chaldean tyranny. This vast heathen power has been casting forth its 'hooks' and 'nets' and catching men as if they were 'fishes of the sea.' It has been gathering to itself the wealth of surrounding countries. It has only to send forth one of its great armies in order to bring in an immense haul of men and treasure. And so these Chaldeans, intoxicated with conquest, began virtually to pay homage to the instruments to which they attributed their prosperity. They sacrificed to their net, and burnt incense to their drag. History supplies some parallels which illustrate the prophet's thought. Thus, for instance, after Napoleon had trampled over Europe, he made a cult of his *grande armée.*

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[1] G. A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, ii. 145.

1. When we consider the matter more closely, however, we recognize a deep underlying truth which affects all classes in all departments of life. Men are always tempted to exalt the apparatus they employ. For two or three generations the world has been dazzled and fascinated and obsessed by the march of mechanical discovery. We feel that we have thereby attained far greater mastery over the forces of Nature: we hardly realize that in point of fact the forces of Nature have also gained far greater mastery over us. More than fifty years ago Samuel Butler published his *Erewhon*—that curious apocalypse in which he predicted the time when mankind would become enslaved by the machines which they had themselves invented. We are at length beginning dimly to appreciate Butler's forecast. Again and again we listen to fresh warnings from expert observers that war in future will be waged mainly by means of machinery. It is not long since Sir Oliver Lodge gave us a lurid picture of tanks and submarines and aeroplanes, carrying no pilots but directed by distant wireless operators, and laden wholly with high explosives or poison-gas or disease-germs. The imagination shudders at such a vision of wholesale slaughter. Yet there are corresponding dilemmas which confront us even in the progressive arts of peace. A single instance may serve for illustration. In the United States to-day probably no workmen enjoy shorter hours and larger wages and better conditions than those engaged in the manufacture of Ford cars; yet complaints increase that these very men are tending to become more and more like cogs in an immense and complicated mechanism. How to avert the peril of degrading human beings into 'Robots' remains the great problem in modern mass production.

¶ 'It strikes me,' says one of the characters in John Bojer's novel, *The Great Hunger*, 'that fire and steel are rapidly turning men into beasts. Machinery is killing more and more of what we call the godlike in us.'

¶ 'Whenever you hear business men discussing a question as between themselves and their work-people they always make it, and they always use the terms, a practical matter, or a personal matter, or a matter of principle, or a matter of business. Niggs, why—that is what I notice—why never a *human* matter?'

Andrew said drily: 'What is the connection?'

Still with eyes upon the fire as though deep in some such crucible the secret lay, still with slow voice and as though through many obstacles he felt his way towards it: 'Why, that every matter of that kind discussed affects somebody else, Niggs; someone who is not present; someone with no voice in that place; but, Niggs, someone *human.* That is the base of it; that is the base of everything, of every single thing, it seems to me; a *human* base. Niggs, if everything has got a human base, why isn't everything looked at, discussed from, administered from the human standpoint?'[1]

2. Moreover, in ways subtler and more far-reaching than these, we discover how balefully an organization can react upon the individuals whom it embraces and controls. Quite apart from current theories about herd-psychology, it is notorious in practical experience how easily any official may sink into a mere appendage of his society—how a tutor gets merged in his college routine, how a parson becomes possessed and swallowed up by his Church, while a monk will confess with pride that his entire self is absorbed into his order. The complex civilization under which we have to live inclines ordinary men to bow down before its institutions. Many people cherish a pathetic faith in the saving virtue of public boards and councils and civic apparatus. Civil servants make a fetish of their bureaucracy, and legislators worship the efficacy of Acts of Parliament.

3. From a different point of view we may recognize how this principle applies to the worship of books as books, which is fashionable in certain quarters. Collectors pay outlandish prices for first editions. Publishers issue sumptuous and costly reprints of great authors, and of authors who are less than great. Yet concerning printed volumes, as well as concerning all other things made by hands, it is true that the spirit quickeneth, while the flesh profiteth nothing. Books, after all, are only

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[1] A. S. M. Hutchinson, *One Increasing Purpose*, 160.

means to an end. 'A good book,' said Milton, 'is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.' But unless that life be transfused into your own being, the library which you are so proud to exhibit might as well be a museum of fossils or a collection of postage stamps. Moreover, this comes to pass even in regard to the Bible. The worst peril of Bibliolatry is that we may worship the letter of revelation in such a way as to miss the spirit. Holy Scripture is meant to be nothing less than a sacrament of the living God to those who read it. Yet in that sacrament the outward and visible sign avails little, unless it becomes a vehicle of inward and spiritual grace.

4. A wise teacher has declared that it is of the essence of sin for a Christian to regard things as though they could be more sacred than persons, and to degrade persons into mere instruments for producing or promoting things. It is such a perversion of real values which persuades Christians to subordinate the end to the means. Yet we do this when we exalt our theology and insist upon our definitions, in place of adoring God Himself. We do this when we lose sight of Christ, in our concern for ecclesiastical apparatus and machinery. We do this when we magnify our favourite methods of Christian service, rather than the Redeemer for whom they exist. Whenever any Christian institution is treated as existing for its own sake, it turns into a snare and hindrance instead of a blessing. In the Church itself experience proves how we may emphasize the construction of sheep-folds and the appointment of pastors for Christ's flock until we forget the One Shepherd and Bishop of souls. After all has been said, the officials and organizations and sacraments of the Church can never be anything better than means to an end—and their sole end is Christ Himself.

¶ After years of activity and wide executive authority, Tucker found it very difficult to settle into the ways of a cathedral town; his scope was too limited, his colleagues' outlook was too small, their methods and aims appeared to him slight and petty. Of course, Tucker's habit of taking a 'big' view made him perhaps too impatient, and there is an amusing letter in which he sets out in characteristic fashion the proceedings of a Cathedral Chapter meeting on one of these points that seemed to him relatively unimportant.

'On Saturday last, at the Chapter here, there was a lengthened discussion on—what do you think? "How to touch the mass of the untouched"? No! "How to help forward the missionary work of the Church"? No! "How to guide the great labour movement"? No! Nothing of the kind! But—how, after the Communion Service was over, the vessels should be carried into the Chapter House for the ablutions. The difficulty was created by the presence of the Bishop. According to ancient custom, the Dean and the Sub-Dean must in the procession support the Bishop, *i.e.* walk on either side of him. Of course, it was impossible that at the same time they could carry the vessels—that would be too much! Then could the vessels be carried behind the Bishop? No; that would be unseemly. Would it be possible for them to be carried in front of the Bishop? That might be done—but by whom? The celebrant ought to carry, but at the installation he will be the Dean. He must walk by the side of the Bishop, or the great central tower would fall! Could they be carried by Minor Canons? That was hardly seemly. I was asked for my opinion. "Oh," I said, "it is beyond me altogether. I cannot plunge down into such deeps." Eventually it was decided to refer the matter to the Bishop. Just fancy five grave and reverend signors devoting a full half-hour to the discussion of such a matter! I asked myself whether it was for this I had come back from the mission field.'[1]

To accept this as a spiritual axiom is not to deny that ecclesiastical organizations are natural and necessary. That Christian faith should take outward form is inevitable. It is owing in no small degree to its organization that Christianity fills the place which it does fill in the world. The annals of Christendom bear witness indeed that the Church 'has added a new chapter to the science of politics; it has passed through every change of form which a State can know: it has been democratical, aristocratical: it has even made some essays towards constitutional monarchy; and it has furnished the most majestic and scientific tyranny of which history makes mention.' In different countries and centuries Christians have paid exaggerated homage to this or that form of Church order.

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[1] A. P. Shepherd, *Tucker of Uganda*, 193.

Multitudes of devout men and women still sacrifice their substance and burn costly incense in honour of some mediæval net. So as we look at our stately cathedrals, let us never forget how Jesus Christ stood in front of that ancient temple which was the holiest shrine on earth, and declared that out of the very stones of the street God is able to raise up living saints and prophets for Himself. To-day, as of old, He calls us to become successors of those apostles who, when they heard His voice, *forsook their nets* to follow Him—and He made them fishers of men.

Habakkuk—On His Watch-tower

Hab. ii. 1.—'I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will look forth to see what he will speak with me, and what I shall answer concerning my complaint' (R.V.).

1. The distinction of Habakkuk is not primarily in what he says, but in the direction he faces, the way he is looking. He is called 'prophet,' but at first he does not adopt the attitude which is characteristic of the prophets. His face is set in an opposite direction to theirs. They address the nation Israel on behalf of God; he rather speaks to God on behalf of Israel. Their task was Israel's sin, the proclamation of God's doom, and the offer of His grace to their penitence. Habakkuk's task is God Himself, the effort to find out what He means by permitting tyranny and wrong. They attack the sins, he is the first to state the problems, of life.

In any biographical history of philosophy the name of Habakkuk must find a place. He is the first of the philosophical school of Hebrew prophets, one of the first of pathfinders through those dark and tangled ways of doubt into which even good people fall sometimes, when their practical experience of human life seems to contradict the doctrines of their religion. He is one of the fathers of that great company of the speculative who have not shirked the contradictions which life seems to offer to faith, but have brought their brains to bear, sometimes with reverence and humility, and sometimes, alas! without either, upon the dark problems of life in their bearing upon what man would like to hope and believe about the Creator. As amongst the disciples stands Thomas, so among the prophets stands Habakkuk, a devout freethinker. He dared to look round and ask what things meant; more than this, he dared to lift his fearless face to the heavens and ask what God meant.

This man, and his like, have helped to raise faith out of stagnation, and have constrained her to make sure that she was grappling herself to realities and not shadows; they have helped to deliver her from the fetish of phrases which had ceased to hold living and operative ideas, and, as perhaps the greatest service of all, they have compelled the salutary discovery and admission that there are some things that even good people do not know; that there is a point where our little tapping staff of inquiry goes clean over the edge of things, and finds nothing that it can probe. And in compelling this discovery, this man and those like him have done by no means their least service, for it is only when faith is taken off its feet that it discovers it has wings.

He fought his doubts and gather'd strength,
  He would not make his judgment blind,
  He faced the spectres of the mind
And laid them: thus he came at length

To find a stronger faith his own;
  And Power was with him in the night,
  Which makes the darkness and the light,
And dwells not in the light alone,

But in the darkness and the cloud.[1]

2. The grounds of the prophet's own perplexities need not now occupy us. They were questions which arose incidentally out of the circumstances of his own day, but essentially they are old problems which are for ever new. Men are for ever freshly stating them as they emerge out of fresh circumstances, and under the challenge of new events. The doctrine of a righteous and holy Father God is beautiful, if we can only accept it, they say. But does not Nature shriek against it, and the tragedies of life contradict it? If a righteous Father, why this world of pain, and why not an end to the long horror of its social ills?

¶ 'God lets them!' cried poor George Harris, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as he bitterly enumerated the atrocities committed by the pitiless slave-holders. He writhes at the thought that, do what he may, he is still a slave and that his wife and child may be sold away from him at any moment. 'They buy and sell us, and make trade of our hearts' blood and groans and tears, and God lets them, He does; *God lets them!*'

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[1] Tennyson.

And Dickens has shown how poor demented Barnaby Rudge was baffled by the same acute perplexity. Gabriel Varden comes upon Barnaby, the lunatic lad, at dead of night, bending over the prostrate, bleeding form of a man who has fallen a victim to highway robbery. 'See,' says Barnaby, 'when I talk of eyes the stars come out! Whose eyes are they? If they are angels' eyes, why do they look down here and see good men hurt, and only wink and sparkle all the night?'[1]

These are questions that men are asking in every age. The temper that so asks may be blasphemous and destructive. Can it be redeemed, and so redeemed as to make contribution to spiritual good? This is why it is worth while to study this prophet, because soon or late every thinking person wants to ask precisely the kind of questions which Habakkuk flung forth from his watch-tower. Let us look at the spirit of his questioning.

(1) It is a temper which, with all its daring, is always reverent, and in its utter frankness is completely sincere. This man never rails against God; he is never irreverent, much less blasphemous. But he is always unmuzzled. His questions are not against God, but to God. He cannot square his belief in a good and righteous God with the facts of life as he sees them, and he feels that he has right of inquiry when he thus finds his faith baffled by his experience. His cry is the pathetic appeal of the man in the New Testament, 'I believe; help thou mine unbelief.' With his reverence there was a complete sincerity. The problems that vexed this man were not those that arise out of a rebellious life and a heart alienated from goodness or indifferent to it. They arose out of the very purity and tenderness of his character.

¶ Habakkuk's is the burden of the finest faith. He illustrates the great commonplace of religious doubt, that problems arise and become rigorous in proportion to the purity and tenderness of a man's conception of God. It is not the coarsest but the finest temperaments which are exposed to scepticism. Every advance in assurance of God or in appreciation of His character develops new perplexities in face of the facts of experience, and faith becomes her own most cruel troubler.[1]

The scepticism that is rooted in a reverent and lofty sincerity can never in the long run be anything but fruitful. God has meant us for goodness, and He has no controversy with such inquiries as arise out of goodness, but only gracious answers.

To all who dare not with their conscience strive,
To all who yearn for this most dear success,
Faith shall be born.

God counts no question heterodox which comes out of an orthodox life.

(2) It is a temper which, amid its questionings, is steadied by a sense of personal responsibility. He feels that he is a man with a responsibility to discharge, and only from the standing-ground of his own faithfulness does he feel that he has a right to ask and expect light.

'I will stand to my post,' he says. How can we have the right of challenge to God concerning His Infinite responsibility, if the measure of responsibility resting upon ourselves is unconsidered or lightly treated? There are many things which are very dark, but for each of us there is at least one thing clear, and it is that we have a duty to do in life, a place in life to fulfil, a responsibility in life to carry worthily. Speculation can only be fruitful when it is planted in rectitude and fidelity. The very power to see what God has to show us is lost if soberness and faithfulness are missing. It is he that 'willeth to do the will that knoweth the doctrine.' 'Light is sown for the righteous,' and it springs up before the faithful man's feet as he labours in the fields of duty.

¶ Lady Henry Somerset, who did so much in the cause of temperance reform, passed through her dark time like others. The heavens were brass. God seemed dead. He was, at any rate, deaf to her beseeching. And she had no heart to go on at the tasks which she had undertaken in His Name. But while she stood under the great tree on her estate at Reigate, the tree of decision as she subsequently called it, she heard a voice which said, 'Live as though I were, and you will know that I am.'[1]

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[1] F. W. Boreham, *A Faggot of Torches*, 229.

[1] G. A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, ii. 136.

When we want to ask questions, let us do it 'standing to our post.' The best of us is but a sentry, with a watch to keep, and a charge to guard.

> Aye, and though the stars be paling,
> And the songs have died to wailing,
> And the glorious cause seems failing,
> And the gallant flag be torn,
> Not the lightning nor the thunder
> Let thy soul from duty sunder.

(3) It is a temper which seeks the highest truth in the highest spirit. Brooding over his problems, this man in spirit climbs to his watch-tower that he may search the secrets of God. 'I will set me upon my tower.' 'I will climb to my rampart.' Divine verities are only revealed to the gaze of the uplifted life. To low thinking, mean feeling, and poor doing, the lights of the upper universe are lost. It is not intellectual acuteness, but elevation of soul, that brings vision. The coarsened soul may perceive the dark enigmas of life, but it will return from its questionings only with a deeper misgiving. 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, and he cannot know them because they are spiritually judged.' Practical purity is the best medium of revelation; it is the 'pure in heart' that see God. Character is the chief condition of illumination; lofty conduct is the kindler of the inner light.

3. What answer did Habakkuk receive to his questionings? They were by no means full and complete. They were not answers so much as clues to the problems that perplexed his soul. To the oldest questions man has asked there is no complete answer. There are still secret things which belong unto God. But we have a larger answer to them than Habakkuk, for we have known Jesus Christ who brings us answers not only in what He said, but more in what He was, that are at least sufficient to live by in confident trust that the larger light we must still await will not betray our faith.

But two things Habakkuk saw which are gain for us also. When he climbed to his watch-tower to ponder the ways of God, it came upon him that what he was considering was a half-told tale, and that to take short views of the ways of God, which extend through the ages, is to take false views. It was a dark time when Habakkuk looked forth inquiringly, but it was a time with issues unworked to their end. God never finishes His work in the dark. In the morning man goeth forth unto his labour. Man works while it is called to-day, for the night cometh when no man can work. But when God works, it is from dark to light, and it is the evening and the morning which make His day, as in the lovely poem of creation. He finishes His work in the morning light, and it is always the morning stars which sing together over the finished purposes of God.

The second thing that Habakkuk saw was that the just shall live by his faithfulness. Paul used this word for high and true purposes, preaching the doctrine of justification by faith. But the prophet's first meaning is that faithfulness, in the sense of integrity, is in itself a principle of life. 'The just man shall live by his faithfulness,' and by 'living' he meant not material prosperity, but moral security and triumph. In a word, that right is right and wrong is wrong to the end of the world, and it is better to suffer and be upright than to flourish and be crooked. The only house of life which can stand against storm and tide is a building whose every stone is squared to the plummet of righteousness.

Waiting Upon God

Hab. ii. 1.—'I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will look forth to see what he will speak with me, and what I shall answer concerning my complaint' (R.V.).

Here is a picture of a man who is alert and expectant. He mounts his watch-tower, keeps vigil, waits for the message which he is sure will come. You feel that he is in a state of spiritual tension. Something is going to happen which will make a difference to him, and he is determined to meet it as it comes. He looks forth, straining eye and ear, with eagerness written on his face. This is how he waits for God and for anything which God may have to say to him. Here is a man spiritually alive waiting upon the Living God.

1. How full the Bible is of this thought of waiting upon God. Again and again the phrase occurs in psalm or prophecy; and as we read

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[1] F. Y. Leggatt.

it we feel that religion was very real to these Hebrews. The writers of the Old Testament realized that, while religion implied conduct, the actual doing of the right thing and the offering of the true worship, there was something behind all that which was far more important. There was what God was waiting to do for those who sought Him. He had blessings to give them; He had truth to show them; He was longing to enter into fellowship with them. All that came first; what man had to do was in response to a prior action of God. And man could not do his part unless he took up that attitude, which they described in expressive language as 'waiting upon God.' Revelation and redemption are the two great words of Scripture, and both emphasize the priority of God. The one tells of a God who wants man to know about Himself, and so gives him a revelation; the other of a God who calls man into fellowship with Himself, and sets in motion a saving process, stooping in love to lift man out of his sin and folly. The priority of God—God taking the initiative—that is written large in the pages of the Bible.

To wait upon God means concentration. It means the quiet hour of prayer and meditation, when we put aside the interests which occupy us in our everyday life and try to realize God's presence. Do we give ourselves time to be quiet? Is it not more and more the danger of modern religious life that it loves bustle and rush and committees and statistics, and neglects both thinking and prayer? 'Prayer is work,' says the old phrase, which is true, for genuine prayer means effort. But is the converse true that 'to work is to pray'? Nehemiah was a very busy man, and with him work was prayer. A prayer atmosphere surrounded his work, and it was there because he had learned the habit of being quiet and of meeting with God. But with many of us the work takes the place of prayer.

¶ The monks of old were too often content with prayer unaccompanied by any practical effort, and ended by leading idle, useless lives, in which prayer was a mere form. Now, on the other hand, the servants of Christ are tempted to labour only, and neglect to give sufficient time to prayer; yet, if they do, their work is bound to suffer. It is said of that mighty spirit of the Middle Ages, St Bernard of Clairvaux, that he found on the days when he spent most time in prayer and in study of the Bible his letters were most rapidly written and most persuasive, and his own schemes were widened or lost in the greater purpose of God; anxiety was allayed, and the power of the Holy Spirit, to which he had opened his heart, was felt in every word he spake, and in his very presence and look. Prayer is indeed work; and there are times when it is the only work in which men should engage. For it is calling on God to put forth His mighty power, and to use us as willing and efficient instruments in His hands.[1]

Bible reading has largely gone out of fashion. But is there any better way in which to wait upon God than to study the great text-book of religious experience? 'The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life.' How can we hope to know God unless we will study the record of the revelation He has given to the world? It is with the soul as with the body. The body needs rest that the muscles may recover their tone. And the soul needs the hour of quiet, when God can draw near and quicken the spiritual life. How splendid are those words of Isaiah, 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.' If we are to do our work for God with power and in the right spirit we must be constantly drawing upon His supplies of strength; and only in the quiet of prayer and thought and pause will those supplies be open to us.

¶ Gilmour of Mongolia wrote a little while before his death: 'When I feel I cannot make headway in devotion, I open the Psalms and push out my canoe, and let myself be carried along on the stream of devotion that flows through the whole book. The current always sets toward God, and in most places is strong and deep.'

2. The man who waits upon God waits in expectancy of receiving something. He has, in other words, a certain view of God. He attributes to Him a definite character. Let us see what view of God lies behind this attitude of expectation. The large thought about God which runs through the Bible is of a Being whose nature it is to be active towards man. God reveals Himself to man, blesses man, has gifts to give him, wants to enter into fellowship

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[1] W. H. Dundas, in *The Churchman.*

with him, sends His Spirit to quicken and illuminate human life. He is a Living God. Wherever there is life, there is activity, output, movement.

Do we really believe that God is of this nature? St Paul asked some disciples at Ephesus, 'Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?' And they replied, 'Nay, we did not so much as hear whether the Holy Ghost was given.' There are not a few professing Christians who are in a similar position. They have heard, indeed, about the Holy Ghost; but have very little experience of His power. For them God is a term which suggests a Being remote and awful, rather than a Spirit close to our lives waiting to enter into them and quicken them. The 'Living God' means nothing to them. They do not conceive of God as the great creative source of life, who is striving to pour His life into humanity, and is constantly being hindered by the fact that men shut the door against Him. The Christian conception of God sets Him forth as a Spirit of Holy Love, who has given men a share in His own nature that He may draw them into fellowship with Himself. He is God the Giver, who longs to give of Himself to man, and has spiritual energies which He can release in response to man's prayer for them.

The giving of God must inevitably be conditioned by our own spiritual state. Spiritual gifts cannot be forced on us. If we are to receive them we must want them, expect them, and open our lives to Divine influences. At Holy Communion, for instance, we fail often to receive the blessing which we might receive, because we do not come to the service in the right state of mind. So it is with Bible reading, or prayer, or any of the means by which we approach God. The eternal spring of His love is ever flowing; but we too often fail to keep clear the channels by which His gifts can reach us. If our waiting upon God is to be fruitful we must practise it with the unhesitating faith that God can give us life, and with the expectancy that He will give it. It is the soul which is alive that reaches out after the Living God. The soul which is dead, or hesitant, or half-hearted in its search for God, will never know the reality of the Divine touch.

3. The question the prophet asked, why all this disorder and suffering was allowed by God, is not directly answered. The answer that Habakkuk receives goes far deeper than any reply to that question. He is bidden trust God, throw himself upon God's character, assure himself that, with God in control of the world, wickedness cannot finally triumph.

What is the real heart or essence of religion? Not to have all our doubts solved, or all our petitions in prayer answered, but *to be sure of God*, to enter into such real and living fellowship with God that He comes to be the most certain of all certainties. There are a hundred problems we shall never solve, and the Christian revelation says very little to satisfy our intellectual curiosity about this mysterious universe in which we live. What it does is to give us a revelation of God as One who, just because He is Love, can be utterly trusted. Christianity says in effect, 'God is a Father, who loves you, cares for you, and seeks to bless you. Believe that, and test it in your lives, by living as His sons. Put God to proof. Expect great things from Him; wait upon Him; seek to know Him; and in manifold ways, and through a growing experience of life, He will make Himself known to you.' That is what waiting upon God does for us. It brings God close to the life. It helps us to know God as a man grows to know and trust a friend he loves. That is better than an answer to a problem. We can wait patiently for the solution of many of our problems if we know God holds the key to them. There are many things a child cannot understand; but he knows that his father understands them, and he is content.

When He appoints to meet thee, go thou forth
It matters not
If south or north,
Bleak waste or sunny plot.
Nor think, if haply He thou seek'st be late,
He does thee wrong;
To stile or gate
Lean thou thy head, and long!
It may be that to spy thee He is mounting
Upon a tower,
Or in thy counting
Thou hast mista'en the hour.
But, if He come not, neither do thou go
Till Vesper chime;
Belike thou then shalt know
He hath been with thee all the time.[1]

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[1] T. E. Brown.

The End Speaks

Hab. ii. 3.—'At the end it shall speak, and not lie.'

'At the end it shall speak and not lie.' This is practically the only thing Habakkuk can say as he stands faced with the old and difficult problem—how this world can be what it is and yet God be the ruler of it. And it is what we can still say when we can say nothing else. As he said it, it may be a counsel of despair. As we say it, there may be a greater confidence in our voice. But, face to face with life, all good and believing men must say the same thing. It is as though we were saying: 'Let us give God time.' Let us try to imagine to ourselves what a task God has. If His object were merely the overthrow of evil, He might make this world a wilderness and reign alone, a King without subjects. But, since God's object is the saving of men, their moral ascent, their hearty choice of higher things, the problem for Him is infinitely complicated. For, at each stage of our life, we must be able to feel that the condition to which we have come is the steady and unfaltering outcome of our own behaviour encountering that Higher Will of God, about which all the time we know enough to make us accountable at once to Him and to ourselves.

1. 'At the end it shall speak and not lie.' As the prophet used these words, they very probably meant for him simply this: that, though evil might seem to be having its free play for a season, later on God would intervene in a dramatic way and vindicate Himself. There are times when that is what is present in our minds when we speak prophetically. We see certain things in operation in this world: people living in a certain way, or certain communities giving themselves over to moral unbelief, to low views of life; and there is a sense in which we can say nothing or do nothing. For there are times when a wave of sentiment or a moral fashion seems to have acquired such head and force that it is futile to argue with it, as futile as it is to sweep back the Atlantic with a broom. We can only stand by until the wave reaches its crisis and breaks and spends itself. Often we have no resource except to bide our time, until those who have launched themselves upon some perverse way of life rush against the hidden nature of things, and learn the truth upon those barriers and ramparts that defend the moral constitution of the world.

2. Take one handful of seeds here and another handful of seeds there and scatter the one kind in one place and the other hard by. An expert might know how different they were, but to us they are the same. The soil is the same and the climate. The days pass, with their showers and their sunshine. In the dark earth those seeds are feeling the solicitations of life, until one day there is a flash of green over the ground. Still our untrained eye cannot pronounce upon their nature. But again the days pass, until it is obvious that the two clumps of flowering things are different. We see in the flower and fruit what was the nature of the seed: for the seed reappears again in flower and fruit. In fact, 'at the end it shall speak and not lie.'

¶ As you ride by rail between Dolgelley and Bala you come to a point in the hills which forms the watershed. And just at that point two streams take their rise. They have, it is practically true to say, the very same birthplace—but one tiny stream turns to the right and the other turns to the left, and so the Dee and the Mawddach, born together, are the entire breadth of Wales apart at the finish. One falls into the sea facing the cold, grey north; the other ends its course facing the golden west.[1]

There is a saying attributed to Solon: 'Call no man happy until he is dead.' Like every deep and sententious saying, those words may have more meanings than one. They might have the Oriental and decadent meaning that death is better than life, and that the only people to be envied are those who have escaped from this world. But the words may have a more robust and healthy interpretation. Call no man happy, envy no man, until you see how the kind of life he is living works out. Wait until you see how he bears up through the later years, how he meets some reverse of fortune, if that should be his portion, or sickness, or the loss of children, or of friends, or the thrusts of memory and the later accusations of God. It is too early yet to say whether on the whole he was a man to be envied. We are poor judges of what is good. We envy a man who has acquired riches with honour, but that alone does not make him enviable, as he himself, if he is a good man, will also confess. For riches may destroy a man's simplicity, may make him proud, may cut him off from the kindness and affection of people. He may not now be able to distinguish between those who are friends and those who are mere flatterers, between those who really care for him and those who are merely looking for something from him. And there is the whole world of ups and downs from which none of us is free. If he has children, they may bring him honour or they may bring him grief. Or someone in whom he greatly trusted may prove false, and the light that was in him may become darkness. And then there are the 'thousand natural ills that flesh is heir to.' No, we cannot call anyone happy until we have reason to know that that one's life is so founded upon God that he has it in him to be satisfied with the love of God, and the fellowship of Christ, though life should strip him bare.

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[1] J. D. Jones.

3. 'At the end it shall speak and not lie.' This is a saying which we should each apply to the principles of life which we have deliberately chosen, or into which we find ourselves drifting. How will they appear to ourselves later on? Life is organic, continuous. We have ourselves as we use ourselves. We meet one stage of our life with the resources which we have gathered in the earlier stages, and we meet the last crisis of life with the resources which we have been gathering all the way. In the end of the days, life will leave to us only such things as it cannot take away. The things which are seen, on which we have spent so much thought, for which we have striven sometimes to the hurt of our souls, these things the rude life-process will take away, as though they had never belonged to us. But the things which together have gone to form our spirit, the personal substance and immortal part of us—those things time cannot touch. With regard to certain of those eternal things, we wish that time might take them from us long before the end. Our memories, if they are unhappy, the mischief we may have let loose upon the world—how we would to God that these might not gather about us in the twilight and dusk of our days. And yet these need not be the deepest, truest thing concerning us. If we have it in us to grieve over them, they are not the only thing God sees in us. He sees our grief about them. He sees our regret, impotent, indeed, to change or undo what is past; but not impotent to affect the deep, true purpose with which we may lay ourselves down and trust the mercy of God in Christ to launch us out upon that further sea.

Life is organic, continuous, inevitable. Things will be disclosed. We shall judge ourselves. We shall obey the true and innermost direction of our eternal part. At the end it will be apparent what was the true motive of our life all the time.

¶ There is a poignant story of Aubrey Beardsley, that man of genius who, dying at twenty-six, left behind a mass of strange drawings like the work of Blake. He was one of that group of rebels in art and in morals which had such a vogue some thirty years ago. In his last days Beardsley became a Christian, and was received into the Church. A terror seized him as to the moral influence of his artistic work. 'I implore you,' he wrote, 'I implore you to destroy all copies of . . . [naming a work of his], and all like drawings that are harmful. Show this to . . . [naming a friend], and conjure him to do the same. By all that is holy, all obscene drawings.' Then he signed his name, adding the words: 'In my death-agony.'

'I am now ready to be offered up,' wrote St Paul in his last letter, a letter to a friend, 'and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. . . . The Lord be with thy spirit.' Truly we have ourselves as we use ourselves. 'At the end it shall speak and not lie.'

The Religion of Silence

Hab. ii. 20.—'But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.'

The fifth woe or taunt in this passage of Habakkuk is flung at the absurdity of idol-worship. Those blocks of gilt wood and stone stand before the prophet motionless, speechless, powerless to interfere in the affairs of men, and incapable of stirring to teach or to help their worshippers. 'Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise! Shall this teach? Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it.' From those dumb and helpless idols the prophet passes by contrast to the thought of the God whom Israel worships. Jehovah, the living God, is in His heavenly temple, where He sits enthroned as Governor of the world, claiming the reverent adoration of all the earth. Him alone let men worship and serve.

¶ The Talmud states that 'companies of angels praise by night but are silent by day because of the glories of the Eternal.' It also mentions that: 'The former Chasidim' (*i.e.* the predecessors of the Pharisees about the Maccabæan period) 'used to sit still one hour and then pray one hour and then sit still for one hour.'

The idea formerly held that the word 'Selah' in the Psalms preserves the memory of a similar hush or pause for silent prayer is denied by modern scholarship. The importance of silence in the Jewish conception of worship is shown, however, in several places, notably in the prophet's exclamation: 'The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.'[1]

1. The God thus known by Israel is our God, and it is in silence that we realize Him best. Amid the bustle and noise of life—when all the world we live in has become to us a market-place, or a workshop, or a battle-field, or a pleasure-ground—we catch only stray glimpses of our God. But all the great silences lead to revelation.

¶ The late Dr G. H. Morrison speaks of an occasion when he visited the cathedral at Cologne, perhaps the most magnificent example of Gothic architecture in the world. Passing into its silence from the crowded streets of the city the sense of the presence of God was overwhelming. 'I knew,' he says, 'that God was present in the teeming city. I knew He was present in the crowded thoroughfare. I knew that where the stir and traffic were the Infinite Spirit was not far away. And yet it is one thing to know, and it is quite another thing to feel; and in the calm and solemn quiet of the cathedral I felt that God was there.'

Our noisy, talkative life is like the surge breaking on the margin of the shore, and away beyond it is the silent ocean carrying the message of infinity. We lose our sense of God in a great city far more readily than lonely dwellers do. And we lay the blame of that upon a score of things—on the strain of business, on our abundant pleasures. Perhaps there is a deeper reason than all these; it is the loss of the ministry of silence; of the solitudes which are quivering with God.

We all speak too much, and make too much noise. Every one has felt irritated sometimes, when in thoughtful mood he could not escape from people's voices. A panorama of the Alps from a Swiss mountain-top may be spoiled even by the cries of '*Wunderschön!*' No one can worship rightly, no one can even hear the call to worship, who does not often feel that he must be silent. This is the religious aspect of the modern demand for more leisure time. And one of the things we most of all need to learn and teach is how to use the leisure that we are demanding, so that our 'silences may be blessed with sweet thoughts.'

2. For worship, there are three main uses of silence—

(1) *To get rid of evil voices that speak within us.*—Passion, selfishness, self-assertion, lust, fear, are voices that cry within the souls of most men more than they know. Their cries mingle with the other noises of life, and so escape notice. But when the soul is hushed for worship it can distinguish any such voice, will feel its wrongness, and be at pains to silence it. There are many thoughts we dare not allow when we realize ourselves in God's holy temple. The silence which discovers and banishes these is a means of moral victory.

¶ When I came into the silent assemblies of God's people, I felt a secret power among them that touched my heart, and as I gave way unto it I found the evil weakening in me and the good reached to, and raised . . . in that inward quietness, stillness and humility of mind where the Lord appears and His heavenly wisdom is revealed.[1]

(2) *To let the 'still small voices' be heard within.*—Often busy people feel that there are many things in their mind and heart which they can only half express, even to themselves. Wordsworth describes these in his *Ode on Immortality*. The reason why these are so inexpressible is often our want of silence rather than our spiritual incapacity. There are some

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[1] L. Violet Hodgkin, *Silent Worship*, 16.

[1] Robert Barclay, *Apology*.

scientific instruments so fine that to do their work they must be set at night in a quiet country-house far from traffic. The mind and heart and conscience are such instruments. All that is best in us of thought and feeling exceeds speech. When we try to speak out all that we want to say, we know how true it is that 'language is a means of concealing thought.' But in reverent silence, thought and love and the sense of right and wrong, in finer shades than language can match, may be drawn out, and the soul attain a richer and fuller being in this temple of God than elsewhere.

(3) *To know God.*—For there is more to be had than the quickening of human nature to its fullest life. There is a Presence in the world ; one whose thought we share, whose love we feel, and whose voice speaks in conscience. That which the finest spirits prize most in silence and loneliness is the real companionship they reveal. We know ourselves alone, yet not alone, for the Father is with us. The holy temple is the place of revelation and communion for its silent worshippers.

¶ Molinos says in *The Spiritual Guide* : 'Just as the body needs sleep in order to recruit its energies, so does the soul require a silent resting in the presence of God. For in this rest God will speak and the soul will hear.'

Sometimes, in our dullness, we grudge the silence of the holy temple, and wish that God would speak to our senses, if only for a moment, so that we might be sure of Him for ever. And, to meet the need of our humanity, God broke the silence when 'the Word became flesh.' The words of Christ remain for us, and teach us through the silence to hear the Eternal Voice.

Revival and the Church

Hab. iii. 2, 3.—'O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known . . . God came.'

'The problem of problems' to Habakkuk, Professor A. B. Davidson said, 'was God.' He felt as Job felt : 'it is God that maketh my heart faint, and the Almighty that troubleth me.' For his was a keen, reflecting, questioning soul ; and God's thoughts and ways perplexed him. Why did He tolerate the sin of Jerusalem ? And, then, how could a holy God select as the instrument of His purifying judgment such a people as the Chaldeans, whose own violence cried aloud for vengeance ? He could not understand it. His mind was puzzled. But the glory of the Hebrew prophets was their reliance on the righteousness of God. And very often this very faith made life perplexing to them and forced them to carry their doubts to God, to challenge Him with the vindication of His own character. And this is what the prophet does. He betakes himself to prayer, and as we read it we feel his passion. 'O for the great past of thy tremendous deeds, whose record is the charter of our faith in thee ! O Lord, revive thy work ! Our fathers have told us of thy mighty work of old. Set it afoot again, so that we can see it on the march ! Blow on the dying embers ; kindle the fading flame ; make it known, so that we must know ! '

So he prayed. And then we read : 'In wrath remember mercy.' The prayer ends : the answer follows. 'God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran.' God came, as He will always come in answer to believing prayer, not maybe as we expect Him, nor to solve all our problems, but to make Himself known to the open eye and the listening ear.

All who believe in religion with more than the empty acquiescence of formal assent have passed through many a time of difficulty and strain like that which drew from the prophet his eager, appealing prayer. Many must feel that it gives expression, deep and moving, to the thoughts and longings of Christ's Church to-day. There is a growing and deepening desire among Christians everywhere for a new chapter to be opened in the story of religion throughout the whole world. But we live, we are constantly being told, in difficult times ; and sometimes we imagine that we are much more sorely tried than those who have gone before us in the faith of Christ. People are always lamenting the decay of religion in their own time, as if religion had not invariably been in conflict with the evil tendencies and the indifference of each successive age. If they would look back across the years and try to learn the lessons of the past their faith in God and their confidence in the living Christ and His Church would be deepened and renewed. There is no tonic, intellectual and spiritual, like the tonic of history.

1. Let us think, for example, of the condition of things a thousand years ago in the middle of

the tenth century. Bishop Lightfoot describes the way in which at that time the foes of Christendom on all sides were tightening their grip upon the Church. 'I can compare,' he says, 'the condition of the Church at this epoch to nothing else but the fate of the prisoner in the story as he awakens to the fact that the walls of his iron den are closing in upon him, and shudders to think of the inevitable end.' Yet the Church revived and survived the Dark Ages. Every one remembers St Bernard's hymn, written in the middle of the twelfth century, in which he mournfully laments the evil times and feels sure that the end of all things is nigh at hand.

The world is very evil,
  The times are waxing late;
Be sober and keep vigil,
  The Judge is at the gate.

Go forward four hundred years from St Bernard's time. The Church was just emerging from the ignorance and confusion of the Middle Ages, on the eve of the Reformation which none can doubt was an epoch-making coming of God anew into His Church. It was then that those great Acts of Parliament asserted the freedom of the Church from papal domination, and opened the door to the worship of the English people in their own tongue, and the possession of the English Bible. Move on yet another hundred years to the time of the bitter controversies between Puritans and Anglican High Churchmen. John Howe, Cromwell's secretary, used words about the condition of things just after the death of Cromwell which are not unlike those of some of our modern pessimists about our condition now: 'Religion is lost out of England farther than as it can creep into corners.' Another hundred years brings us to 1729, early in the reign of George II. 'Never since the Lollards had there been a time when the clergy were held in such contempt,' writes Dr Overton of this period. And yet that year 1729 marked the formation at Oxford of the little band of devout men, including Charles and John Wesley, which was the spring whence issued the Methodist Revival and the Evangelical Movement in the Church of England that followed it. To us who are continually being assured by superior persons that the days of Christianity are numbered it is profoundly interesting to read the words of the great Bishop of Durham, Joseph Butler, who in 1736 wrote: 'It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons, that Christianity is not so much as a subject of enquiry; but that it is now at length discovered to be false.'

Pass on again to the beginning of the nineteenth century, much nearer to our own day. Wilberforce, the great advocate of the abolition of the slave trade, says of his time, 'True religion is steadily declining in England. The growth of prosperity, the multiplication of great cities, the splendour and luxury of London, the prevalence of the commercial spirit—all this has led to the discontinuance of the religious habits of a purer age.' Is not that just like the way in which many contrast our time with those that have gone before it?

¶ Wordsworth puts it:

Plain living and high thinking are no more:
The homely beauty of the good old cause
Is gone; our peace, our fearful innocence,
And pure religion breathing household laws.

It was a stirring time, for it was then that the great Reform Act was passed. And this was followed by the Abolition of Slavery in 1833 and the Factory Acts that began the work of undoing the evil effects of the Industrial Revolution in which we are still engaged. We are very oppressed with a sense of our own bad times, but Professor G. M. Trevelyan goes on to speak of 'the return of bad times, the violence of working-class despair in town and country, the gravity of middle-class fear of a social uprising beneath their feet.' Not long before this Robert Southey had said of the Church of England that 'no human means can avert the threatened overthrow of the Established Church.' And yet this was followed by the wave of reforms that swept over the Churches of England and Scotland between 1830 and 1850. And those same years were also marked by the beginning of the Oxford Movement.

To read history thus is to discover in the past a great deal that we are familiar with in our own time, which, like those that have gone before it, resounds with declarations about the failure of the Church. Many will remember that John Galsworthy and others, whose novels and plays so many of us read and appreciate, declared during the Great War that the end of Christianity was in sight, and that whatever the War had or had not done it had destroyed Christianity. How ignorant and foolish this is, as if the faith of Christians were rooted in such shallow soil as to be so easily plucked up and destroyed! To look back as we have been doing is to learn to look around with clearer vision, and to look onward with faith and courage, believing that God, who is ever coming to His Church, will surely revive His work in the midst of the years, and give us the renewal that we sorely need.

2. In drawing encouragement from the past we must not minimize the many serious difficulties of the Church to-day. We hear much of divisions, but a much more serious menace to religious life is the spirit of secularism, the total neglect of things spiritual and unseen, which the great World Missionary Conference which met at Jerusalem in 1928 declared to be the chief enemy of religion in all parts of the world and among all races. It is undeniable that an enormous majority of the English people seldom or never enter a place of worship. This prevailing apathy with regard to public worship recalls vividly the picture which Jesus drew of the irresponsiveness of His own time. 'We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced.' There are reasons for this religious apathy which at once suggest themselves to anyone who knows and understands the circumstances of our time. Life is full of manifold new interests, many of them superficial, and it is very easy to become so occupied with them that the soul is gradually starved into a state of numbed indifference. On the other hand, life for many is so crowded with business cares and worries that the weariness and exhaustion which follow in their train leave little appetite for the pursuit of the things of the spirit, and only a negligible sense of the paramount claims of God.

¶ Men whose minds are much enslaved to earthly affairs all the week cannot disengage or break the chain of their thoughts so suddenly as to apply to a discourse that is wholly foreign to what they have most at heart. Tell a usurer of charity and mercy and restitution, you talk to the deaf: his heart and soul, with all his senses, are got among his bags, or he is gravely asleep, and dreaming of a mortgage. Tell a man of business that the cares of the world choke the good seed; that we must not encumber ourselves with much serving; that the salvation of his soul is the one thing necessary. You see, indeed, the shape of a man before you, but his faculties are all gone off among clients and papers, thinking how to defend a bad cause, or find flaws in a good one; or he weareth out the time in drowsy nods.[1]

Add to such preoccupation the mental perplexity about the great questions of life which the collapse of authority has led to in the mind of the average man, and it is not difficult to understand why it is that the Church seems so largely to have lost its hold upon the English people. And as one of the causes of this we have a lamentable lack of intensity in many of those who still do make a profession of religion. The religion of Jesus is a distinctive way of life; it means something; it is salt to arrest corruption, and light to guide in darkness. 'Nothing kindles except fire.' And when those who profess it are nowise spiritually distinctive, it is not surprising that they make little or no spiritual impression upon those with whom they are constantly mixing in the daily business of life.

We can set over against all these difficulties some things which are encouraging and are favourable to progress. There is a manifest and widespread interest in religion, and a growing sense of the need of some spiritual authority by which to regulate life. The fact that the British Broadcasting Corporation affirms that nothing in its programmes is so popular as the Sunday evening service is not without significance. There are living movements astir in the Church of God. One is that movement towards unity among Christians generally, which was made dramatically evident at the World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne in August 1927. Jesus is still proving Himself to be the world's Saviour in the dark places of the earth. Think of Uganda fifty years ago and to-day. Into that half century has been crowded the birth and growth of a new Christian people out of the dark depravity of mid-African heathenism. Think also of such facts as the Student Christian Movement, which numbers its hundreds of thousands of members among young men and women students throughout the world.

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[1] Dean Swift

Many of us are eagerly looking for a revival of religion, a new coming of God. We cannot organize it; we cannot change men and women; we cannot manufacture Christian experience. We can reform abuses, and overhaul our machinery, and do all the other necessary things that we are in some degree trying to do. And we can go back to the original springs, from which have flowed all the successive renewals that history has witnessed in the life of God's Church.

¶ If you desire to know what will promote the interests of any concern, find out how it started. Something like it, something truly answering to it, will revive it. It must stand by the law of its origin. . . . We need to be faithful to our origin.[1]

We can follow the tokens of God's guidance; we can obey when He calls us out to new adventures in Christian living; we can pray for renewal. We must pray earnestly and persistently, longingly, as the prophet of old did.

¶ 'The sea is out,' wrote Samuel Rutherford from his prison in Aberdeen, 'and I cannot bring a wind and cause it to flow again; only I wait on the shore till the Lord sends a full sea.' They who wait on the shore till the Lord sends a full sea are not disappointed.

Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
  Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

The Perils of Middle Life

Hab. iii. 2.—'O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known.'

In Dr Garvie's work, *The Christian Preacher*, the writer says that pastoral experience has convinced him that the 'middle-aged need the attention of the Christian preacher no less than the young. If the passions of youth, with their perils, have abated, middle age has its own evils: a lessening enthusiasm, a growing indifference, an increasing absorption in the cares of the world and the pursuit of wealth, an imperceptible decrease of the vitality and vigour of the soul.'

This is a wise and timely reminder. Sermons to young men and women have long had their place among us, and there has been a remarkable development in the art of preaching to children; but do we remember as we ought the burdens and sorrows and perils which come upon men after the middle years of life have been reached? Possibly the dangers that beset youth are the more obvious and dramatic, and that is very likely why preachers are so constantly preaching special sermons to the young. The dangers that beset the middle-aged are more secret and subtle, and not so manifestly shameful, but they are none the less fatal to the soul, and they are all the more perilous because they work so secretly and so insidiously. Our most deadly foe is not the Knight of the Morning Star, but the Knight of the Noonday Sun.

The sin our Lord appeared to fear the most was the sin of avarice. It has been often remarked that Christ did not fear sins of passion half so much as He did the love of gain. Now avarice is not a sin of youth but of middle life. The ghastliest failures in the New Testament were the failures of men in middle life. Take two illustrations. Judas apparently had come through the perils of youth unscathed. He had, as men say, no stain upon his character; but somehow and somewhen he allowed the love of money and the love of power to enter into his heart. And when he saw that his Lord would gratify neither of them, when he saw his discipleship was going to bring him neither wealth nor great place, he committed the crime of history, and sold his Lord for thirty pieces of silver. It was a tragic shipwreck Judas made of his life.

And the same thing may be said of Demas. Demas was no longer a young man; he had been for some years a fellow-labourer with the Apostle Paul. He had come off victor over the Knight of the Morning Star, but he collapsed before the attack of the Knight of the Noonday Sun. 'Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.'

What are the special dangers of middle life?

1. One of the most obvious is *the hardening of the mental tissue.* It is a familiar saying that a man is as old as his arteries. When these begin to harden old age is at hand, and death is not far behind. And there is an intellectual sclerosis that is the forerunner of intellectual death. And just as a wise man will seek by wise means to ward off the physical peril, so

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[1] Pastor Couve.

it is the duty of those who have passed the mid-time of their years to watch against the stiffening of their mental joints, to keep their minds hospitable to new ideas. We are not called to make our own all the new thoughts of a new time; we are called to meet them with understanding and with charity, and to resist the temptation through sheer inertia to throw ourselves unthinkingly on the side of things as they are.[1]

¶ In his lectures to medical students, Sir William Osler urges his young doctors to keep learning. Do anything, he says, to keep your brain fresh! Go back to the university class-room or the hospital ward; take up new studies or new hobbies; adopt any precaution against an arrested intellectual progress! He begs old doctors to keep in touch with young students. And, in his lecture on 'Basset,' he commends the old doctors of France who mingle their white locks with the boys who are just beginning, and pursue their profession to the end with the passionate ardour of youth. On almost every page Sir William Osler warns doctors against settling down to a stereotyped order of things. '*Keep going!*' he cries, again and again, and '*Keep growing!*'[2]

2. Another temptation of middle life is to yield to *the spirit of weariness*. In part, of course, it is due to causes that are beyond our control. We have lost, to begin with, the physical buoyancy of early years. We can no longer say:

> Whether we lay in the cave or the shed,
> Our sleep fell soft on the hardest bed,
> Fresh we awoke on the morrow.
>
> All our thoughts and words had scope,
> We had health and we had hope,
> Toil and labour, but no sorrow.

The spirit, too, is fatigued. It was said of Adam Clarke that his heart to the last leapt up when he beheld a rainbow in the sky. But most men are not so fortunate: they have to confess themselves powerless against the years.

¶ In his memorable portrait of Napoleon, Hazlitt speaks of the unconquerable energy that flamed in every part of the theatre of war, that ran to meet danger wherever it showed itself most formidable, 'of the strength of purpose and self-confidence which constitute the definition of a hero or great man, attempting the utmost that is possible with the utmost of your power, and without the smallest loss of time.'

And sometimes our weariness springs from disappointed hopes. Once we thought the prize was to be ours: now we know that here, at least, we shall never be crowned. When we set out on the journey we expected to go far: now we know that the top of the road has been reached, and that for the rest of the way it will dip steadily towards the twilight and the darkness. Why, then, should we concern ourselves? Toil and trouble, trouble and toil—what is the good of it all? There are few men in their fifties who have not known that evil mood.

¶ The wear and tear of daily living is such that men tire out in the pursuit of the good life. With the best intentions men get discouraged by repeated failures. They do not definitely give up, it may be, but they loosen hold of the higher principles and cease to care. The chief tragedies of the moral life come of the moral weariness. The most deadening question one can ask as to the moral life is, 'What is the use?' When life is young there is a tingle about the moral battle on its own account; but the years come on without fail. All sorts of compromises have to be made as practical adjustments to the world in which we live. Legitimate hopes are thwarted, griefs settle down upon us, power begins to slacken. The mockery of death is on every hand. Then comes the question, 'What is the use?' This does not mean that a man who has fought a noble battle all his life is about to cease fighting. It does not mean that he will give himself up to selfish indulgence. It does mean that he has lost the zest of the moral struggle. He may hang on grimly to the end, but with the inner fire burning low.[3]

3. And then close behind weariness comes *cynicism*, the temper of the man who has persuaded himself of what Mrs Humphry Ward calls 'the uselessness of utterance, the futility of enthusiasm, the inaccessibility of the ideal, the practical absurdity of trying to realize any

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[1] G. Jackson, *Reasonable Religion*, 47.

[2] F. W. Boreham, *The Fiery Crags*, 134.

[3] F. J. M'Connell, *The Christlike God*.

of the mind's inward dreams.' That is the cynical temper, and we know how it works. It has not only put out its own fire, but it has its bucket of water always handy for the fire of another. Above all, it loves to frown down the generous enthusiasms of eager youth : 'Ah ! so I thought when I was your age.'

Your wisdom made me worn and old
  And sick of life beneath the sun,
But you passed onward calm and cold,
  Unconscious of the harm you'd done,
By your crusade so strictly truthful,
  Against enthusiasms youthful.

We can see this cynical and scornful temper reproduced in the literature of our day. It is the disillusioned, middle-aged view of the world that modern literature takes. It is a bitter, blear-eyed, faithless view to take. And, at bottom, it is as false as it is faithless. It is the cynicism of the disillusioned. It is the peculiar peril of middle life. Cynicism always argues loss of faith. And when a man has lost faith in his fellows he is well on the way to losing faith in God. And when faith is lost and honour dies the man is dead.

¶ On Ibsen's table beside his inkstand was a small tray. Its contents were extraordinary. Some little carved wooden Swiss bears, a diminutive black devil, small cats, dogs, and rabbits made of copper, one of which was playing a violin.

'I never write a single line of one of my dramas,' said Ibsen, 'unless that tray and its occupants are before me on the table. I could not write without them. It may seem strange —perhaps it is—but I cannot write without them,' he repeated. 'Why I use them is my own secret.' And he laughed quietly.

But is it a secret ? Is that tray not the explanation of much that is found in Ibsen's work ? Bitterness, the portrayal of life which is empty, and cynicism, the turning of men into puppets ! [1]

4. And another peril of middle life is *materialism.* The danger of forgetting the unseen and eternal is the special and peculiar peril of the middle period. As we get on to middle age responsibilities accumulate, and the time of leisure becomes less and less. We become so engrossed and absorbed in the demands of business that we have scarcely time to think of anything else. And this is specially true in these days of fierce competition.

The mere pressure of life brings this peril with it—the peril of materializing life and starving the soul. But that is not all. This urgent, insistent world tends not only to engross our time, it tends also to absorb our souls. In the fierce struggle for bread-and-butter we begin to think that bread-and-butter is the only thing worth having. Immersed in the world as we are, we begin to think the world's prizes are the only prizes worth winning. We lay all the stress upon 'goods.' We pay no heed to the eternal riches. It was by a sure instinct that John Bunyan set Vanity Fair about midway in Christian's journey.

The corroding materialism of middle age is more deadly to the soul than the hot passions of youth. It is more deadly, because its peril is not recognized and no shame is attached to it. Sins of passion Society has agreed to brand as shameful, and that very brand of shame attached to them acts as a warning against them. But love of the world, absorption in the pursuit of its wealth and power, is reckoned no disgrace. It rather counts to a man's credit, and therein lies its deadlier menace.

That is why this prayer of Habakkuk's is one those of us who are in the middle period need perpetually to offer : 'O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years ; in the midst of the years make it known.' God alone, a vivid sense of God, can deliver us from weariness and cynicism and love of the world. That is why those of us who are in the very midst of life's responsibilities, who feel the pressure of its crowding cares, who are plunged into the very vortex of its business, need to snatch at every opportunity of bringing ourselves face to face with God. Where there is no vision the people perish. But if only we make the Most High our habitation we need not be afraid of the arrow that flieth by day, nor of the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor of the destruction that wasteth at noonday.

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[1] J. Burns.

THE HEAVEN-BORN LOGIC OF FAITH

Hab. iii. 17-18.—'Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.'

A MAGNIFICENT utterance of faith, with but few equals in all literature! Spoken in Old Testament times it yet rises to the sublimest heights of Christian assurance. Nor is it merely a triumph of poetic imagination. The prophet is facing the grim realities of which he speaks. *Experto crede!* He knew what war and devastation and famine meant. His country was being overrun and eaten up. The flocks were being swept from the pastures by raiding bands and the land was falling out of cultivation. It was a dark night with no evidence of dawn. The prophet had preached faith in God as the very wellspring of man's life. 'The just shall live by faith.' But faith had begun to fail in many hearts. And little wonder. Where was the God of Israel? Where was any sign of His presence and protecting care? What gain was there in serving Him? How much longer could faith hold out against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune? Surely it was obvious that faith, already beaten down and breathless, must soon expire if no help came. Then it was that the prophet rose to the full height of his stature, and in an ecstasy of abandonment uttered his great confession.

I

Let the Worst Come

Let the worst come! Do you ask whether faith can bear this burden and that? Pile on burdens to the last straw and faith will bear them all. Let utter ruin and starvation come and faith will be found singing to the end. Though barns be empty and fields barren and pastures desolate, 'yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.'

Faith has a heaven-born logic of its own. Human reason would argue that under certain circumstances it would be impossible to hold on to faith in God. 'Can a man be a Christian on £1 a week?' asked a questioner at an open-air meeting, evidently expecting a negative answer. In these days, when economic problems occupy so large a place in the public mind, and when the influence of environment on character is apt to be exaggerated, we all have an unconscious tendency to concede that faith in God cannot be expected to survive under certain conditions of life. To talk of faith in God to those who have no decent houses or are out of work seems a mockery. It is like offering a stone for bread. 'My gospel is bread first,' said a political leader, and though we may not put it as bluntly as that, we practically take it for granted that these economic problems must first be solved before a field is prepared for faith. Now one would not wish for a moment to minimize the importance of these economic problems or the Church's interest in solving them. Neither would one deny the obvious fact that the hard conditions of life under which many of our people live make faith in God difficult for them. But it would be contrary to known facts to assume that faith was impossible, and it would be high treason against the Gospel to postpone for a single day its offer of Divine grace because we felt that the economic conditions of the people were too adverse.

Faith is a mystery even to believers. We are often haunted by the fear that faith will fail. We see our neighbour in some deep trouble, and we cannot imagine how we, in his place, could bear up under it. At times it seems as if the godly were tried beyond endurance. Losses and sorrows come, sickness, family trials, bereavements which cannot be averted by the most earnest prayers, and it does look as if God had forgotten to be gracious, as if His mercy were clean gone for ever. Then we fear there must come a breaking-point. 'Curse God and die,' said Job's wife when she saw that godly man brought so low. It seemed to her impossible to hold on longer to God in the face of such manifest dereliction.

But faith stands the strain. Like high heaven it
rejects the lore
Of nicely-calculated less or more.

Its ways are not those of the counting-house. It keeps no ledger with mercies and blessings on the one side over against losses and trials on the other, thriving only when the balance is on the right side. Even when it has no balance-sheet to show, even when outward tokens of God's favour are few, yet it contrives to live and blossom like an Alpine flower amid the snow. When Sir Thomas More heard that his house and barns had been burned down he wrote his wife a most Christian and cheery letter in which he bade her, since it had pleased God to send such a chance, 'never to grudge thereat, but take it in good worth, and heartily thank Him, as well for adversity as prosperity.' 'Therefore,' he concluded, 'I pray you to be of good cheer, and take all the household with you to church, and there thank God, for that He hath given us, and for that He hath left us, which, if it please Him, He can increase when He will. And if it please Him to leave us yet less, at His pleasure be it.' These were no idle words, for history records that afterwards both in prison and on the scaffold he bore himself with the same serene and cheerful faith.

Faith is no fair-weather pilgrim. While it enjoys the sunshine it is ready to face the storm. It may hope for the best, but it is not daunted by the worst. Indeed, the more adverse the conditions are, the more conspicuously its mystic power and heavenly nature is revealed. 'We are not careful to answer thee in this matter,' said the three Hebrew youths to the king. 'Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us. . . . But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.' They were assured that even in the midst of the fiery furnace faith could live. Such was the faith of Job. Tried beyond measure though he was he could still boldly say, 'Let the worst come.' 'Though he slay me yet will I trust in him.'

II

Faith Defiant

Thus faith utterly confounded the devil's logic. 'Doth Job serve God for nought?' said Satan, arguing that it was a mere matter of a balance-sheet. It paid Job to serve God, and he would continue to serve so long as it paid him. But let payment be withdrawn, let the balance be on the wrong side, and then it would be seen that faith would vanish. In God's providence Job was delivered up to be tested to the uttermost, with the result that the slander was triumphantly refuted when faith came forth from the trial like pure gold. The secret of this is that faith depends on God alone, and not on any of the gifts of God. It does not rest on any earthly foundation but draws its support from heaven above. In one of the great London churches there was a massive pillar which seemed to support the roof. The hidden base of the pillar, however, obstructed some necessary alterations, and then it was found possible to cut the foundation clean away. The pillar had never really supported the roof, and now, instead of supporting, it was actually suspended from the roof. Even so is it with faith, which in the last resort is held erect by power from on high. No doubt it is often supported by visible providences and manifest gifts of God. Especially when faith is weak and ignorant God in His grace may condescend to grant unusual tokens of His presence and blessing. It well accords with His fatherly care thus to cherish faith in its first faint beginnings. 'The bruised reed will he not break and the smoking flax will he not quench.'

But faith is found to be independent of such supports. This is the unanimous testimony of the saints. It is God, and God alone, on whom their hope is set. God is their refuge and strength, steadfast when all else fails. God is their rock, their tower of defence. God has a secret place where He can hide His people, as in a pavilion, till the trouble be overpast. The prophet here expresses the same thought under a very different, and as it may seem a very whimsical, metaphor. 'He maketh my feet like hinds' feet.' The picture is of the mountain gazelle leaping sure-footed among the crags. It may be grazing quietly in the valley, but at the first alarm it is away like a flash, and presently it is safe on some inaccessible height beyond reach of the hunter and his dogs. So can faith, when hard pressed, escape away and take refuge upon its high places.

In all this we have an impressive testimony to the reality of the Unseen. It is a fashionable doctrine in some quarters to-day to represent religion as simply a projection of the human mind. Encompassed by impenetrable mystery man sets his imagination to work. He gropes about, he thinks he sees an awesome shape in the surrounding darkness or hears a voice. But it is all mere imagination; there is no reality to correspond. Man is like the Indian juggler who professes to throw the end of his rope into the air and to climb up depending on nothing. To which we reply that faith must find some real point of support in the unseen else it could not sustain, as it does, the whole weight of a human soul. If we saw a man dragged by a rope out of the greedy waves the inference would be inevitable that there was power at the other end of the rope. What, then, are we to make of David's experience? 'He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters.' To David at least it was self-evident that he was lifted up and sustained by some power higher than his own. Some years ago a wandering Jew from Poland fell down exhausted at the writer's gate, and the doctor, being called, said he could not live till morning. One of the company said sympathetically, 'It seems very hard that you should have to die like this so far from home.' But to the astonishment of every one the old man looked up with a bright smile and said, 'I don't care. Messiah's come!' Then, turning his eyes to the writer, he said, 'Read to me in the eighth of Romans, "Neither death nor life shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord."' Was this a mere delusion, a mocking fancy with no unseen reality to correspond? Then,

earth is darkness at the core,
And dust and ashes all that is.

III

Faith Exultant

But the most characteristic note of faith is that at its highest it rises exultant over trouble. 'Faith can *sing* through days of sorrow.' The prophet's faith here is a faith that sings. The words he uses to describe his mood are very emphatic and, one might be tempted to say, exaggerated. The word translated 'rejoice' means literally to shout aloud, while the second word, translated 'joy,' means to dance or spin round. What he really says is, 'Though all my worldly goods be lost, in the day of utter ruin and starvation, I will dance and sing for joy in the God of my salvation.' A similar feeling is expressed by the psalmist who said, 'Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.' He had watched the merrymaking of the prosperous at their harvest-homes and vintage feasts, but it was nothing to him compared with the wellspring of joy that was bubbling up in his own heart.

It need hardly be said—yet perhaps it does need to be said—that the faith that sings is far superior to the faith that sighs. A modern writer, describing one of his finest characters, says, 'She had not the face of the typical saint; her face was always puckered with smiles.' It must be admitted that the face of the typical saint, as portrayed by art, is not usually puckered with smiles. It may be partly owing to this that faith has come to be regarded as near of kin to sad-faced resignation. This world is a vale of tears and the will of God is seen in all the dark events of life. Under this heavy dispensation the man of faith is required to bear up as best he can, ever enduring trouble or apprehensive of it, able to refrain from breaking out into open rebellion and murmuring, but unable at times to repress a sigh. Something of this spirit breathes through Charlotte Elliott's well-known hymn, in which the will of God is exclusively associated with darkness and lonely grief and bereavement, and with no pleasant thing. One would wish to speak with sympathy of this beautiful hymn, remembering that it was written for invalids by one who was herself a life-long invalid, but sung in public worship it can only give a false view of the life of faith. It is an attitude of mind which, however pious it may be esteemed to be, is both unhealthy and unchristian. It is condemned alike by modern psychology and by the New Testament. There are higher reaches of life and sunnier climes which are the true home of faith.

Faith, of course, does not always sing. There are times when it holds on with closed lips and clenched teeth. The great saints have experience of the depths as well as of the heights. Indeed it would appear that the depths to which at times they sink are in proportion to the heights to which they rise. Elijah, after his triumph on Mount Carmel, is next seen under a juniper tree praying to God that he may die. St Paul on his own confession is ‘pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.’ Our Saviour Himself passed from the Mount of Transfiguration to the dark hour in Gethsemane. That faith would not be human which was not in some degree affected by the ebb and flow of human life and the fluctuations of human feeling.

The prophet then, we may take it, is here in an exalted mood. He had gloomy doubts and heart-shaking fears like other men, indeed he does not conceal them from us; but here his faith rises to its true height and shows what it is capable of. Now faith is to be measured at its highest and not at its lowest, when the tide is at the flood not at the ebb. So we take it that faith exultant, the faith that sings, is the ideal mood of faith. This seems to be pointed at in Christ's promise to His disciples, ‘Your joy no man taketh from you.’ And we can see that the promise was fulfilled, more or less, in their experience. St Peter writes to those whose faith in Christ has brought to them a ‘joy unspeakable and full of glory,’ even though they may for a season be in heaviness through manifold temptations. St Paul continually writes in the same strain, and in the dungeon at Philippi he proved the truth of the promise. There, as he lay, flogged and fettered and sleepless with pain, at midnight he was heard praying and singing praises to God.

This exalted mood comes when God fills the soul with His glory, so that all earthly troubles are for the time forgotten and submerged under a flood of heavenly joy. Such an experience is not uncommon. Any strong passion may become so dominant as to occupy the whole heart to the exclusion of all other thoughts and feelings. The first Marathon runner who carried the news of glorious victory to Athens gasped out, ‘Rejoice!’ with his latest breath. His soul was radiant with a triumph-joy that made him insensible to fatigue and wounds and death. We see the same spirit notably manifested in the case of the martyrs. Such triumphant faith was given them and such visions of God's glory that they went blithely to the place of execution. The bells that tolled their death-knell sounded in their ears like wedding-bells as some of them declared. The tortures they endured seemed to them of no account, and in some cases appear to have been physically unfelt. This is doubtless what St Paul means when he speaks of being made ‘more than conquerors.’ He means that the power on our side is so irresistible that it brushes aside all opposition as a thing of nought. The man of faith is ‘more than conqueror’ when he is so upborne that he does not feel the strain of battle, but is only conscious of being carried through in triumph. He does not need painfully to fight his way, but soars aloft to where the enemy cannot touch him. One notes often in the bearing of the martyrs what can only be described as a quiet ironical humour, a gentle sense of amusement at the rage of their persecutors who are toiling in vain to injure one whom it is not in their power to hurt. Their victim has become a serene spectator who knows that presently he will pass in triumph far beyond their reach. In this exalted mood he finds it easy to say with the prophet, ‘Let the worst come, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.’

We see, then, in all these things what faith is capable of and to what heights it can rise. To us lowly dwellers in the valley such heights may seem totally inaccessible, yet let us never think so, for the abundant grace given to prophet and saint and martyr in their hour of need is available for us also. When Oliver Cromwell on his death-bed had the great words of St Paul read to him in which he says, ‘I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me,’ he paused and reflected sadly, ‘It's true, Paul, *you* have learned this, and attained to this measure of grace; but what shall *I* do? Ah, poor creature, it is a hard lesson for me to take out! I find it so.’ But after a moment, faith began to work, and his heart to find support and comfort, and he said thus to himself, “He that was Paul's Christ is my Christ too.” And so drew waters out of the well of Salvation.’[1] That well is as deep to-day as it ever was, and deeper always than the deepest human need. So we must never judge this joyous and triumphant faith as a heavenly experience beyond our reach. It should rather be regarded from the Christian standpoint as normal and to be cultivated as a settled mood. One of the psalmists declares, 'My heart is fixed, Lord, I will sing,' and there is a certain ring of determination about his words. Probably he means that often he had sighed, often been silent in trouble, but now he sees the better way, and is resolved that henceforth he will sing. Come what may, his heart is fixed, he will sing. It is well spoken and strikes a true Christian note. 'Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say rejoice.' So wrote the Apostle, himself triumphing over the discomforts of his prison at the moment of writing. Let this at least be our aim, and faith will bring us in an increasing measure a serene and happy independence of the changes in our earthly lot, and at length we shall find, when the evil day comes, that even then we have the heart to rejoice in the Lord and joy in the God of our salvation.

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[1] Carlyle, *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, ccxxv.

J. H. Morrison

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THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

INTRODUCTION

I

Date and Author

With 'the word of the Lord which came unto Zephaniah' we reach the breaking of a silence in recorded prophecy. This silence had lasted for almost three-quarters of a century. Isaiah's ministry, so far as we know, did not extend beyond the reign of King Hezekiah, who died about 692 B.C. During the long reign of Manasseh (*c.* 692–638 B.C.) the religion of Jehovah, with its distinctive witness and worship, fell on evil days. The king's complete subservience to his Assyrian overlords encouraged, probably necessitated, the adoption of Assyrian cults. There was at the same time a recrudescence of various forms of superstition, necromancy, and nature worship, and a casting aside of the moral inhibitions and sanctions of the nation's true faith. There appears to have been even active persecution (2 K. xxi. 16) of the staunch adherents of the type of religion proclaimed by such as Amos. It required great daring to announce a prophetic message of warning or rebuke. If any such oracles found their way into circulation they were likely to be anonymous or pseudonymous. Some such may have been incorporated in the collections which comprise our Books of Isaiah or Micah. But we cannot identify them with certainty. Thus, so far as our knowledge goes, prophecy is silent under Manasseh and the very brief rule of his son Amon. It is 'in the days of Josiah the son of Amon,' that the silence is broken by Zephaniah. There were other 'prophets' in his day, as he himself indicates (iii. 4); but he stigmatizes them as 'reckless and faithless' (A.V. and R.V. 'light and treacherous persons'). They were not responsible and sincere announcers of the will of God; and we have lost nothing in having no record of their words. In Zephaniah we hear the bold authentic note of God's true spokesman. Although he is placed after Nahum and Habakkuk in the canon of Scripture, his oracles precede theirs in point of time. For he delivered his message in the earlier part of Josiah's reign (*c.* 637–608 B.C.), while in all likelihood neither of them antedated by much the fall of Nineveh (612 B.C.). It is most probable, also, that Zephaniah's voice was heard in Jerusalem just before Jeremiah began his long career of maligned prophecy and misunderstood patriotism.

It may be that the name 'Zephaniah' holds a hint of the dark days of Manasseh's rule. For it means '(he whom) Jehovah has hidden.' The verb 'to hide,' which constitutes part of the prophet's name, signifies not merely to conceal but to treasure, to preserve as of value. Its meaning may be studied in such passages as Ps. xxvii. 5 and xxxi. 20, which speak of those whom God kept safe in times of trouble and persecution. The prophet's parents may have given their child this name as a mark of confidence in Jehovah, and even with some feeling of half-superstitious hope that it might serve him as a safeguard in the impious and dangerous times into which the boy was born.

Of Zephaniah's parents the father at least had very probably royal blood in his veins. We may not unjustifiably deduce this from the genealogy which the opening verse of the book contains. This pedigree is peculiar in that it reaches back four generations to the name of the prophet's great-great-grandfather. As a rule, where a prophet's parentage is indicated, it is in the customary Semitic form, So-and-So, son of Such-and-Such: *e.g.* Isaiah ben Amoz (Is. i. 1), Jeremiah ben Hilkiah (Jer. i. 1). But in Zephaniah's case his lineage is traced back to one Hezekiah (A.V. Hizkiah). Why should it go back to that name, or why should it stop short at that name, unless the name were a well-known and significant one? This suggests that Zephaniah's great-great-grandfather may well have been Manasseh's predecessor on the throne of Judah, the good king Hezekiah. The prophet would thus be a distant relative of the king under whose rule he prophesied, Josiah being the son of Amon, the son of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah. While Zephaniah has scathing things to say about some of those connected with the reigning house, he has no word of rebuke, or even of reference, to the young king himself. Indeed Zephaniah's prophecies, though betraying no hope of a general national amendment, may have been one of the influences in directing the king's mind towards those reforms which, after the finding of the Book of the Law (621 B.C.), were promulgated and enforced with a quite prophetic enthusiasm (2 K. xxii. 3–xxiii. 24).

II

The Age

Comparing the passage cited above from 2 Kings with Zephaniah's references to religious and other conditions in Jerusalem and Judah (*e.g.* i. 4–5, 8–9; iii. 1–4, 7) at the time when he prophesied, we feel that these oracles of his must be dated earlier in the reign of Josiah than the great Reformation. If we take the year 626 B.C. we are probably in the region of time in which Zephaniah, a young man between twenty and twenty-five years of age, felt himself constrained to utter his messages from God.

The year 626 B.C. was in many ways a fateful one for the vassal states of the Assyrian Empire. In that year died the great Ashurbanipal. For some twenty years before then even his vigour and ability could not prevent the signs of the coming disintegration from showing themselves. As a result of Ashurbanipal's invasions in the early part of his reign Egypt was still Assyria's nominal vassal. But under the Pharaoh Psammetichus I she was gradually assuming the attitude of independence and equality. On the north-east of the Assyrian dominions the growing power of the Medes, and in the south the waxing sentiment of independence among the Chaldeo-Babylonians could not but cause uneasiness in Nineveh. Moreover, for a generation or two nomads from the region to the north of the Black Sea had been finding their way through the valleys of the Caucasus; first Cimmerians, and then Scyths. These had overrun Armenia and large tracts of Asia Minor. Towards the end of Ashurbanipal's reign marauding bands of Scyths had penetrated into Syria (*c.* 630 B.C.), gradually thrusting farther south until they reached the very frontier of Egypt. They captured the Philistine city of Askalon, but were bought off by the Pharaoh. The tide of their irruption gradually receded northwards again, leaving a scrap of reminiscent flotsam in the subsequent Greek name of Bethshan at the eastern end of the Plain of Esdraelon (that highway for invaders)—'Scythopolis.' It is not improbable that in Zephaniah's oracle upon Philistia (ii. 4–7), as well as here and there in the language he used to embody his ideas of doom and destruction, we have echoes of the menace caused by the approach of these Scythian nomads, as well as by their presence on Judah's Philistine frontier, and even within her own borders.

Such was the age of unsettlement and surmise, of mingled hope and foreboding, in which Zephaniah felt himself under a Divine compulsion to lift up his voice with a proclamation from Jehovah of His verdict upon, and His purpose towards, Judah and the nations.

III

The Message of the Book

Doom.—The keynote of the message with which Zephaniah believed himself to be charged was doom. The opening words of his message as we now have it are (i. 2, 3): 'I will utterly consume (literally, "sweep away" or, as we should say, "make a clean sweep of") all things from off the face of the ground (not "the land," as in A.V., which might seem to mean only Judah), saith the Lord. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven and the fishes of the sea. . . .' This comprehensive and uncompromising announcement may well be thought of as coming to utterance on the lips of a young man of strong ethical sensibility and passion, stung by the spectacle of callousness and cruelty and ungodliness in his own and other nations. It breathes something of a young man's impatience and ardour, and of his feeling of helplessness in the face of sluggish indifference or of brutal material force.

Zephaniah is in the line of Amos and Isaiah as regards his view of how God's holiness must react against man's sin. There *must* be a revelation of God's righteous resentment against evil, a 'day of Jehovah' which will be a day of judgment and of catastrophic punishment. Zephaniah insists on such an event, and on its imminence. He pictures it in impressive and dismaying terms (i. 14–18): 'The great day of the Lord is near, it is near and hasteth greatly. . . . That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess. . . .'

Though his message is thus austere and condemnatory, Zephaniah does leave a loophole of hope. He has no word of appeal to men as from the heart of God's mercy. He does not plead in a wooing note as one who seeks to move men to a gracious and fruitful penitence. But he gives a call and announces a possibility. The doctrine of his master Isaiah as to a remnant has its place in Zephaniah's view of the future. 'Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth (or, better here, "the land," Judah alone being in view), which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger' (ii. 3). The possibility implied in these words is put into the more emphatic form of a promise in iii. 11–13. The words of jubilant confidence and the radiant hope of a high destiny for Zion and Israel which we find in iii. 14–20 must almost certainly be considered a later addition to the genuine prophecies of Zephaniah. They are regarded as such, on good grounds, by the great majority of scholars. In respect of date and of general outlook they may be brought into connection with Isaiah xl.–lv. Beyond the day of judgment Zephaniah only seems to see the possibility of the survival of a small company of humble and truth-loving folk.

But while there is this gleam of hope flickering across the words of Zephaniah, the clouds hang dark and low and menacing in his oracles. He comprehends both Judah and the nations in a stern and awe-inspiring proclamation of impending doom. What did he see in his surroundings that demanded so catastrophic a fate at the hands of a God whose character was such that He could not look on unheeding and inactive?

Judah.—The reason for the doom which Zephaniah announced in such minatory accents he sees first of all in the condition of things at the capital of his own people. Judah and, particularly, Jerusalem are the scene of those evils which demand dire punishment. We must not allow Zephaniah's apocalyptic outlook to obscure for us the fact of his keen perception of the moral realities of his own day and of his immediate surroundings. His gaze goes out into a dark and lurid future only after his eyes have rested in penetrating scrutiny on the facts of the present.

These facts, so far as they concern Jerusalem, are set before us in three passages. The first of these (i. 4–6) describes some of the persons upon whom God is going to 'stretch out' His hand and whom He will 'cut off.' The second (i. 8–12) is part of the description of the 'sacrifice' which God is about to celebrate, with people in Jerusalem for the victims. This day of sacrifice and its concomitants is described in terms which are Dantesque in their sombre yet vivid character. The third passage (iii. 1–7) is a renewed description of the state of things in Jerusalem, beginning, 'Ah! she that is defiant and polluted, the oppressor city!'

In these passages many different classes in the population are paraded before us and characterized in scathing terms of condemnation. Worshippers of Baal and of the host of heaven, priests of idolatrous shrines ('Kemarim') and unworthy priests of the regular cultus, as well as braggart prophets; a degenerate ruling caste, and greedily venal judges; palace officials, perhaps mercenary bodyguards, who carry on superstitious practices and murderous intrigues; money-laden merchants of Phœnicia; a populace many of whom seek to combine the worship of Jehovah with a reverence for the Ammonite Milcom or, it may be, the Phœnician Molech (or Milk), while others are sunk in sluggish and hopeless scepticism. All alike have remained unmoved by the varied and continuous manifestations of God's righteousness in their own midst and in what has befallen other nations.

Such is Zephaniah's picture of his own people; such the moral necessity of the doom he pronounces upon them in God's name. In many cases he seems to be striking at foreign influences permeating the nation's religious, political, and social life, and displaying themselves even in the dress of the aristocracy. Judah's distinctive character in worship, belief, morality, and communal life is being undermined. It has, in fact, been almost destroyed.

The Nations.—The menace to his people's national and religious welfare from foreign customs may be one of the reasons for the fact that Zephaniah so decidedly and emphatically embraces all other nations in his message of doom. In i. 2, 3 and iii. 8 it is a world-wide judgment and destruction that is announced.

Tempted to sway in the matter of her political allegiance between Egypt and Assyria, Judah was also open to unceasing and penetrating streams of manifold influence from both quarters. In the passage (ii. 4–15; very probably verse 11 should be omitted) in which certain nations are mentioned by name as objects of the Divine retribution, we may take the 'Ethiopians' to indicate the Egyptians who in recent times had been ruled by Ethiopian dynasties. Nothing definite is said about them as a reason for their having addressed to them God's doom, 'Ye shall be slain by my sword.' Assyria is dealt with more particularly. After a picture of the desolation to which Nineveh will be reduced, we have her characteristic temper presented to us in a few significant words: 'This is the exulting city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me' (verse 15). Condemnation is not passed on the great pagan city for the same kind of reason as it is passed on Jerusalem (*e.g.* in iii. 2, where Jerusalem's attitude to her own God, Jehovah, is portrayed); the Assyrian capital is judged on broad, human grounds. She had displayed the same vaunting and intolerable and cruel pride as was condemned and abhorred in nations or individuals under the term *hubris* by subsequent Greek historians and dramatists.

Of the other peoples mentioned by Zephaniah the Philistines on the one side, and Moab and Ammon on the other, were long-standing foes of Judah; and our prophet makes specific reference to the attitude of contempt and bitter hostility which the latter peoples maintained against the Israelites. Neither on metrical nor on historical grounds is there convincing reason for omitting, as some scholars desire to do, these oracles against Moab and Ammon. Zephaniah selects for mention, from among all the peoples on whom God's judgment will fall, typical nations on Judah's immediate borders—west and east; and on her more remote yet clearly visible horizons—south-west and north-east.

Apocalypse.—The insistence of Zephaniah on the universal character of the coming day of doom is one of the points which give a more truly apocalyptic colour to his oracles than we find in his predecessors. We see in him the early signs of a tendency which was ultimately to increase to such an extent that characteristic Israelite prophecy disappeared in the vague and fulminating clouds of apocalyptic. As there is a vague and wide comprehensiveness in Zephaniah's message of judgment upon all men and all living creatures (i. 3), so there is a corresponding vagueness as to the instruments, human or other, who are to accomplish the Divine purposes. We may find in some of Zephaniah's descriptions of the coming destruction (*e.g.* i. 14–18 and ii. 4, 5) imagery and circumstances that could be suggested by the Scythian invaders. But on the whole such reflection of actual historical doings or agents is faint. In the day of God's 'anger' and 'jealousy' supra-human agencies seem to achieve His purposes and inflict His punishments. God, who was uncompromisingly and unalterably righteous, sent forth His fiat which was overpoweringly and irresistibly effective.

W. M. Mathieson

The Sin of the Settled

Zeph. i. 12.—'And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.'

1. The fiercest of all the prophets, Zephaniah begins with the sweeping threat, 'I will utterly consume all things from the earth, saith the Lord.' Countries so diverse as Philistia and Assyria, peoples so far apart as the Ammonites and the Egyptians, are united in his indignation, and he sums up his message of doom by announcing a day when the Lord will summon before Him all nations that He may pour upon them His 'fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.'

There was, perhaps, a special reason for the prophet's view that the world was on the brink of a catastrophe. He had seen the outbreak of a truly appalling calamity, an invasion of Tartars. An army of mounted shepherds, Mongolian savages, had left their native steppes in South Russia and Turkestan, and had flung themselves upon the civilized races of the South. Until the discovery of gunpowder no power could resist the Tartar hordes. In this, their first, irruption they shook the Assyrian kingdom to its base; they swept through Palestine, and exacted an enormous blackmail from the king of Egypt as the condition of sparing his country. It might well seem that these yellow savages were the instruments of God's extremest wrath. But Zephaniah's sombre imagination seems to go beyond the horror even of savage warfare and to picture some kind of supernatural vengeance. He is the earliest of the Apocalyptists, the inaugurator of that strange literature which filled the minds of the Jewish people in the second and first centuries before Christ.

Whether Zephaniah's awful message was suggested in this way, or simply by a vision of an earth which had forsaken its Maker, we do not know. In any case he lives in history as the great herald of judgment, and it is to his vivid imagery that the great hymn of the Middle Ages owes its birth :

Dies iræ ! Dies illa
Solvet sæclum in favilla.

¶ In his requiem 'Hymn for the Dead,' at the end of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, Sir Walter Scott has the following paraphrase of some lines of the *Dies Iræ* :

That day of wrath, that dreadful day,
When heaven and earth shall pass away,
What power shall be the sinner's stay ?
How shall he meet that dreadful day ?

When, shriveling like a parched scroll,
The flaming heavens together roll ;
When louder yet, and yet more dread,
Swells the high trump that wakes the dead !

Oh ! on that day, that wrathful day,
When man to judgment wakes from clay,
Be Thou the trembling sinner's stay,
Though heaven and earth shall pass away !

It is told of Diogenes, the Greek philosopher, that he was once seen going about the streets of Athens in broad daylight with a lantern in his hand, and, on being asked what he was doing, replied, 'I am searching for an honest man.' Jehovah's search is of a different kind. He is seeking for evil men, and there would seem to be many in Jerusalem, but doubtless the prophet uses the figure to indicate how keen the Divine scrutiny will be. None will be able to evade the gleam of that all-searching eye. Perhaps he also uses the parable to indicate the kind of men God is searching for. It is not those whose iniquity advertises itself on the skies. It is men who are suffering from a more subtle spiritual disease—'the men that are settled on their lees.'

2. What does the figure mean ? New wine was left upon the lees only just long enough to fix its colour and body. If not then drawn off it became thick and syrupy, with a sweet and sickly taste. So Jeremiah says, 'Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel . . . therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed.' This is a picture of the conservatism that clogs the wheels of life. Social reformers know the type too well, and so do religious reformers. Reformers are prepared for the opposition of the devout and the simple-minded, but the trouble is the stolid hostility of the men who have settled on their lees and do not want to be worried. They have seen movements come to nothing, so for their part they will not move ; they will sit still. God's causes, said a Scottish preacher, are never defeated by being shown up, but by being sat upon.

There is a parallel passage to Jeremiah in the Psalms which throws further light upon the figure : 'Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.' God has set our life in a cycle of continuous change because without it we would degenerate into sensual and unspiritual men, 'men that are settled on their lees.' It is a dangerous thing, even for the soul, to live a life of routine, whether of pleasure or of business. We know the value of change in our physical life. There are but few to-day who do not feel the necessity of change for the sake of their bodily health. The city toiler would not think his life complete if he did not have his annual change to the seashore or mountain glen. There are some, indeed, who think that in this universal desire for change they detect a lack of the stability which made our fathers the men they were. But restlessness is one thing : love of change quite another. The world we dwell in is ever changing. The sky is ever changing ; the clouds are ever assuming new and more fantastic forms. The sea is ever changing ; a thousand tides and ten thousand waves are ever sweeping over its changeful bosom. The earth is ever changing ; the death of winter passes into the flowers of spring, and the glory of summer mellows into the maturity of autumn.

And is what is good for Nature not good for Nature's highest work? We say, 'A rolling stone gathers no moss'; but who wants to gather moss? If we wish to be an old moss-covered boulder we should go to the graveyard. Better be the rock which the torrent detaches from its mountain bed and, dashing down against cliff and boulder, bears on at last to the seashore, there to be polished clean and pure, there to be smoothed into a perfect oval by the glorious carving of Nature's hand. God wants men to be not moss-covered boulders, covered with the accretions of material wealth, but polished stones, and change is the chisel by which He carves us into the image of 'the perfect man.' Our life is one of gradual but constant change. Speaking generally, there are four great changes in human life—childhood, youth, manhood, and old age. And these periodic changes are coincident with great changes in the spiritual life within, caused by the vicissitudes and trials which accompany them.

¶ If the very law of life is a law of change; if every blossom of beauty has its root in fallen leaves; if love, and thought, and hope would faint beneath too constant light, and need for their freshening the darkness and the dews; if it is in losing the transient that we gain the Eternal: then let us shrink no more from sorrow, and sigh no more for rest; but have a genial welcome for vicissitude, and make quiet friends with loss and Death. Through storm and calm, fresh be our courage, and quick our eye, for the various service that may await us.[1]

3. But there are some men who do not respond to these outward changes. As the psalmist says, 'They have no changes.' They have no trials in their life, or, if they have, they make but little impression upon them. They have an easy way carved out for them, and the prosperity they inherit follows them all their days. 'They are not tried like other men.' Are they, therefore, to be envied? Not if that striking word of Jeremiah is to be believed: 'Moab hath been at ease from his youth. He hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel. Therefore his taste remaineth in him, and his scent is not changed.' It is the same thought as Zephaniah's when he speaks of 'the men that are settled on their lees.' These favourites of fortune have lost all touch with spiritual realities. They are men 'who say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.' The condition here described is one of moral atheism. These men are not dogmatic atheists. But though they may not deny God they treat Him as non-existent.

¶ However much pessimists, like Schopenhauer and Hartmann, may rail at the suffering, as distinct from the sin, that is in the world, it is an incontestable fact of experience that suffering can fashion human character as nothing else can do. Bacon and Shakespeare are no mean authorities where a knowledge of human nature is concerned; and we are all familiar with Shakespeare's 'Sweet are the uses of adversity,' while Bacon forcibly says, 'Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New.' 'That misery does not make all virtuous,' says Dr Johnson, 'experience too clearly informs us; but it is no less certain that of what virtue there is, misery produces far the greater part.' These are not the words of morose fanatics, but of thoughtful men of the world. And an equally impartial modern moralist makes the striking observation that 'the older men grow in life, the more work becomes their real play, and suffering their real work.'[1]

Such a moral atheism as Zephaniah describes is more insulting to God and more dangerous to its possessor than the open atheism of the unbeliever and the scoffer. It is more insulting to God because what conception of the Most High can be more unworthy than that of a God who is Himself settled on His lees, who takes no interest in moral issues and, like an absentee landlord, allows the world to go to wrack and ruin without even a thought of its condition? It is also more dangerous, because dogmatic atheism at least implies an awakened conscience and an intellectual discontent, and you can get at it better than that easy type of latitudinarian indifference which says of God, 'He does not do good, neither does he do evil.'

4. How is such a spiritual condition to be cured? Its victims must be shaken up. They must be stirred from their condition of moral and spiritual inertia. And it is this, says Zephaniah, that God is going to do. 'I will

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[1] J. Martineau, *Hours of Thought*, i. 138.

[1] J. R. Illingworth, *Christian Character*, 52.

punish the men that are settled on their lees.' I will make them feel that sin is a reality. A 'day of wrath' is coming, when men will realize in the deepest recesses of their being that there is a God. That day shall be 'a day of trouble and distress, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness.'

If we think Zephaniah's prophecy too gloomy we have only to open our newspapers to see that sin is a terrible reality still, that it is an evil thing and a bitter to forsake the living God. All the world over to-day there are homes and hearts which are desolate because of those who said to themselves in the morning of life, 'The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.' There is no more fatal deity for any man to worship than an Absentee God.

Moral Scepticism

Zeph. i. 12.—'The men . . . that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.'

1. WHO are those people who say in their hearts, 'The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil'? As they are described in Zephaniah, they are not passionately bad people; they are rather inert people. They are no longer young; they are not yet old. They are old enough to have outlived their own venturesome days; but they are not old enough to see the vanity of most things that the world prizes. They are 'the wise and prudent' from whom, our Lord said, the great things are always hidden. They are so secure that they feel no urgent need of the things we mean when we speak of God. They are so comfortable that they ask for no change. It is this low contentment that breeds atheism. And atheism on its practical side is cynicism. They have seen the rise and fall of many hopes. And now their view of the entire business of life is that it is a thing of ups and downs, not a thing of downs and ups, as *we* rather hold who believe. 'Give the dreamers of the race,' these say, 'the youths, the maidens, the poets, the reformers—give them time and life will tame them!'

¶ Tennyson gives us, in *The Holy Grail*, a picture of the man who has 'settled upon his lees,' surrendered his early ideals and hopes and betaken himself to a materialistic and sensual life. Like the other knights of King Arthur's court, Sir Gawain set out in search of the Holy Thing—which is really only a symbolical way of saying that he, too, started with the ideal of a great and holy and Christlike life. But he soon wearied of the quest, and, finding a silk pavilion in the field and merry maidens in it, he abandoned the quest. And, on his return to King Arthur's court, he scoffs at the very idea of the quest. 'It is a madness,' he says,

> But by mine eyes and by mine ears I swear,
> I will be deafer than the blue-eyed cat,
> And thrice as blind as any noonday owl,
> To holy virgins in their ecstasies,
> Henceforward.

This mood finds expression in the Book of Ecclesiastes—Let us walk in safe and prudent paths, but why should we trouble ourselves overmuch about these matters of morality? Be not righteous overmuch, neither be thou overmuch wise, for why shouldest thou with all this troubling destroy thyself? Be not, on the other hand, overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish. Violent sins undoubtedly shorten life and destroy it. Why shouldest thou die before thy time? After all, 'the Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.'

Beyond a doubt there is a great deal of this sort of moral scepticism in our own time and in regard to our own lives. The hindrance to the progress of the Kingdom of God lies not in the outrageous and notable sins—indeed those who have the strong and progressive righteousness could fight victorious battles against prominent atheism, or declared immorality; but that which for ever clogs the chariot wheels of the Kingdom of God is that vast hidden class of those who will not come out into the open one way or the other, that great class which Dante saw first when he had entered the gates of hell, the spirits who were not rebellious, nor faithful, but were for themselves. 'Hateful, distasteful to God and to His enemies'—the class of the morally sceptical, and those who think it is not worth while.

The thing which they said in their hearts—there is no God of Judgment—was not wise in the circumstances, and is never true. Not long afterwards, as we must reckon time in history, the security in which these trusted was swept aside. The city which had been spared from Sennacherib was captured and occupied and made desolate. And the Bible does not hesitate to declare that the ultimate disaster in which the chosen people were scattered abroad, as they are at this day, came to pass because there were far too many people who, when the very hour of destiny was striking, were saying that 'God would not do good, neither would he do evil.'

2. Often we must allow that we cannot see this busy, energetic, moral government in the world, either as regards nations or individuals. It is only sometimes that honesty appears to be the best policy. There are moral collapses, disgraceful, disgusting to our moral sense, and yet, without any appearance of repentance, the subjects of them seem to creep back into respectability or even credit. There are struggles, persevering as it seems, against vice and sin which never seem to become effectual or to succeed. And we say, surely God does not care. But the scepticism is shallow. There is certainly no complete picture of Divine judgment here. This world is no sphere in which a Divine judgment works itself out fully and satisfactorily. We walk by faith, certainly not by sight. But what there is is this—an indication of Divine judgment which checks anybody who thinks at all. If he takes the sceptical conclusion, 'The Lord does not do good, neither does he do evil,' there is something rooted alike in men's moral consciences and in their experiences which assures them, in spite of its imperfect manifestation here and now, that those who are on the side of righteousness are in harmony with the system of things.

¶ 'There is enough in this world of judgment according to righteousness to beget in the mind of any man who thinks an implicit expectation of somewhat further, a sense that there is a certainty of something like a Divine judgment according unto righteousness working in human lives here and now.'[1]

¶ Emerson says, in his Address to Abraham Lincoln: 'There is a serene Providence which rules the fate of nations, which makes little account of time, little of one generation or race, makes no account of disasters, conquers alike by what is called defeat or by what is called victory, thrusts aside enemy and obstruction, crushes everything immoral as inhuman, and obtains the ultimate triumph of the best race by the sacrifice of everything which resists the moral laws of the world.'

God will render to every man according to his works, by no arbitrary judgment from which there can be any possible exemption, but by an inevitable moral law which works as securely as the physical laws of growth and decay, of life and destruction. Undoubtedly our sin, our every sin, will find us out. There is no caprice about moral results. There is no favouritism, no wheedling, no capricious exception. 'By no clever trickery,' wrote a well-known teacher, 'can profligacy or low living come into possession of the beatitudes.'

In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law: but 'tis not so above;
There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In his true nature.[2]

¶ Bishop Gore writes: 'I once visited the ruins of a famous monastery in the South of France which has a scandalous history, upon which the popular vengeance fell almost first in the Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. It is the monastery of Lachaise de Dieu; and in the corner of the ruined court there was a dispensary kept by some Sisters of Mercy, and a good nun showed me those ruins, showed me the great church desolate and dank, showed me the stones which lay moss-grown around the desolate court, and she looked round and said, "Le bon Dieu a son jugement,"—the good God has His judgment.'

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[1] Butler.

[2] *Hamlet*, III, iii.

THE BOOK OF HAGGAI

INTRODUCTION

I

The Man

'Haggai the prophet': that is all we are told about the man whose name stands at the head of this interesting and historically important little book. In view of the nature of his prophetic task his name is significant, although probably only accidentally so. It is an adjectival form from the word *hag*, which means a pilgrimage-festival. It is probably a variant of Haggi, which is found elsewhere in the Old Testament (Gn. xlvi. 16; Nu. xxvi. 15). With this we may compare the Arabic term *hajji*, a designation of honour acquired by performing the great Muhammadan *hajj*, or pilgrimage, to Mecca. Haggai may have been so called from being born on a festival date. Whether born in Babylonia of exiled parents, or a child of a family left behind in Judah, we have no means of telling. In neither case would his parents be living in circumstances in which the national feasts could be fittingly observed. But it may be more than merely fanciful to suggest that, in giving their child the name by which we know him, they had hopes that one day it might be possible for him to have his share in a glad national pilgrimage-festival at the capital of his people.

The part of Haggai's life-work revealed in the little collection of four prophecies which has come down to us shows him engaged in trying to re-establish such a condition of things in Jerusalem as would enable a reconstruction of the nation's religious life and ritual worship to be effected. Towards this end he wishes to see the Temple rebuilt. That is the task to which, under God's hand, he addresses himself, and to which, by voicing God's will, he endeavours to rally leaders and people. His prophetic ministry, so far as we see it, had the quite immediate and practical aim of getting a worthy house of God erected, to be the centre of the nation's activity in its religious, and perhaps also in its political, aspect. While Haggai conceived the Temple as a place of ceremonial and emotional significance in reassuring the people as to God's presence and care, and in affording them a setting in which to worship Him with seemly reverence, he may also have thought of it in connection with the hopes which he cherished of a kingly 'Messianic' career for the Jewish prince Zerubbabel, who was the governor of Judah under Persian suzerainty.

II

The Temple

By the date of Haggai's prophecies (520 B.C.) the Temple still lay in the ruined condition in which the Babylonian army had left it in 586 B.C. The destruction of the building had been very thoroughly effected, and all that was valuable and portable of the Temple equipment had been carried off as spoil (see, *e.g.* 2 K. xxv. 9, 13–17; 2 Ch. xxxvi. 18, 19). When the 'Chronicler' comes to tell of a restoration from exile in the first year of Cyrus the Persian's newly-won sovereignty over Babylonia (538 B.C.) he speaks of this monarch's being moved by God with a prompting to arrange for the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple (2 Ch. xxxvi. 23; Ezr. i. 7, 8). Into the various problems connected with this restoration under Cyrus—its extent, character, personnel, etc.—we cannot here enter. That there was such a restoration seems altogether probable; and that in Ezra i.–vi. we have some more or less reliable details as to the subsequent course of events may likewise be agreed. The returned exiles set up an altar of burnt-offering as one of their first acts. In 536 B.C. they began to prepare for the rebuilding of the Temple and got the length of laying the foundation, ceremonially at least. Then came opposition from neighbouring people such as the Samaritans, who, on being refused any share in the enterprise, put difficulties in the way and lodged complaints against the Jews' action, so that the work ceased (economic conditions would also be a contributing factor) until the second year of Darius (see Ezr. iv. 1–5, 24). At Ezr. v. 1–vi. 13 we have described to us the circumstances under which, in the above year (520 B.C.), the work was resumed with the prophetic encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah. The prophesying of these two had its fruition when four years later the Temple was completed and dedicated (Ezr. vi. 14–18). That, then, is the historical situation—the events of the year 520 B.C. in Jerusalem—in which we have to place Haggai and listen to his words.

III

THE DATES

Into the above setting the compiler of the Book of Haggai (the prophet himself, or a disciple-editor) enables us to fit with precision the prophet's four messages, and two notes of the progress of the work. The dates are given according to the day, month, and year of the reign of the Persian king, Darius I, Hystaspis (521–486 B.C.). It may be useful to draw out the scheme of dating as follows:

Chap. i. 1: 1/6/2nd year of Darius=1 September, 520 B.C.
 'Came the word of the Lord by Haggai' (first message).
Chap. i. 14–15: 24/6/2nd year of Darius=24 September, 520 B.C.
 'They came and did work,' where 'did' is the verb and 'work' is a noun. This work was a clearing away of rubbish and a preparing of the site.
Chap. ii. 1: 21/7/2nd year of Darius=21 October, 520 B.C.
 'Came the word of the Lord by Haggai' (second message).
Chap. ii. 10: 24/9/2nd year of Darius=24 December, 520 B.C.
 'Came the word of the Lord by Haggai' (third message).
Chap. ii. 15–18: 24/9/2nd year of Darius=24 December, 520 B.C.
 'The day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid' (verse 18)—*i.e.* the same day as in '*this* day and onwards' (not 'upward,' vv. 15, 18). This refers to the foundation of the Temple at the time when the prophet is speaking (520 B.C.), and not to any effort made in 536 B.C.
Chap. ii. 20: 24/9/2nd year of Darius=24 December, 520 B.C.
 'Again (*i.e.* a second time on the same day) the word of the Lord came to Haggai' (fourth message).

IV

THE ACTORS

Haggai and his contemporary Zechariah (see Zech. i.–viii.) were God's prophets, *i.e.* mouthpieces, in furthering the enterprise of temple-building. Who were the agents in the actual conduct of the undertaking, the men to whom the prophetic messages were addressed by way of summons and inspiration?

First there was 'Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah' (i. 1). The chief point to be noted about him is that he was a scion of the Davidic line of kings of Judah, being the grandson of that King Jehoiachin (or Jeconiah, 1 Ch. iii. 17) who was carried off captive from Jerusalem by Nebuchadrezzar in 597 B.C., and who afterwards received in his exile considerate treatment from the ruling house of Babylon (2 K. xxiv. 12, 15; xxv. 27–30). In the Book of Ezra (ii. 2) Zerubbabel appears as one of the leaders of the restored exiles who returned to Jerusalem in 537 B.C., but not at first as their supreme civil ruler, the latter being called Sheshbazzar (Ezr. i. 8, 11). Some would identify the two persons, but they are most probably to be distinguished. In any case, Sheshbazzar drops out of the story and Zerubbabel takes his place as the leading civil functionary.

As religious head of the reconstituted community there is (Hag. i. 1; Ezr. iii. 8) 'Joshua the son of Jehozadak' (R.V.). Here again we have one who was a representative of the old pre-exilic regime; for Joshua's grandfather was Seraiah the chief priest, who suffered death after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (2 K. xxv. 18–21).

V

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

With Haggai, as with other prophets, there were phenomena in the circumstances of his age which, taken in conjunction with the spiritual condition and needs of his nation, had strong significance. These phenomena did not by themselves call forth or induce the prophetic consciousness and its contents. But they, so to speak, interlocked with and corroborated and witnessed to the message which welled up in the prophet's heart. Haggai saw such signs of the times in two directions.

There was a scarcity of the material necessities of life owing to bad harvests and failures in cattle-rearing (see i. 6, 9–11; ii. 15–17). The cost of living was consequently very high, and people could not get enough to satisfy their physical needs. Their earnings went no length at all in the purchase of goods: 'he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes' (i. 6). Probably these hard times and sorely straitened circumstances had deterred the people from enterprises such as rebuilding the Temple. But Haggai's message was that the prevailing scarcity was to be interpreted as the result of God's displeasure at their slackness in His service. It was not to be taken as a deterrent from, but as a summons to, service in the cause of God and religion.

Again, farther afield there were other signs of the times. The accession of Darius to the throne of Persia (521 B.C.) had been marked by revolts in many provinces. These months were a time of unstable conditions throughout the empire, and the tremors of this unsettlement were felt in Judah. Such tremors, Haggai believed, portended yet further 'shaking' (see ii. 6, 7; and, more explicitly, ii. 21, 22) wherein the purposes of God would be felt at work.

VI

THE WORD

To the people of Judah in such a day there 'came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet.' The scheme of the Book of Haggai may be formal, and may give some impression of stiffness and repetition in its outlines. But the true note of prophecy is sounded. Haggai has no dubiety as to the source of his utterances: he was but their vehicle, they were God's Word. He speaks as one who was definitely commissioned by God to convey intimations of the Divine will (see i. 13, where 'in the Lord's message' would be better rendered 'by virtue of the Lord's commission').

Haggai's message had as one of its aspects *rebuke.* He could be as scathing as any of the prophetic company, dismissing men's feeble excuses for their neglect of the task of temple-building by telling them that they had been busy enough and lavish enough in the building of their own houses (i. 4, 9). Evil had so permeated their lives that it tainted all their actions and all their worship (ii. 11–14).

But Haggai's proclamation of God's word had also the other aspects of *encouragement and promise*; and these predominate over the elements of warning or scorn. The people are to feel that this enterprise of temple-building is a thing in the line of God's purposes, and therefore a venture in which His interest is strongly engaged on their behalf (i. 8, 13; ii. 4–9, rendering in verse 7 by 'the desirable things of all nations') and as a result of which they will experience His blessing (ii. 19). In the closing message of the book (ii. 20–23) these high hopes are made to culminate in an exalted position of trust and privilege for the people's leader, Zerubbabel. He was, as we have seen, of the royal Davidic line; and now Haggai pictures a Messianic career in store for him. His grandfather Jehoiachin, carried into captivity, had been like a signet ring plucked by God from His hand (see Jer. xxii. 24). But in Zerubbabel this doom will be reversed: God will take him as a signet again, thus bestowing upon him authority, honour, and special dignity, making him in fact His own representative and vicegerent.

What the actual fate of Zerubbabel was we do not know. But under Haggai's summons he played his part in the rebuilding of the Temple, which rose again in Jerusalem as a monument of loyalty and service to God from both prophet and prince, and as the centre round which Judaism rallied to carry on its Divine mission to mankind.

W. M. MATHIESON

Unfulfilled Beginnings

Haggai i. 5, 6.—'Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little.'

1. SEVENTEEN years had elapsed since the edict of Cyrus had given permission to the exiles in Babylon, after their fifty or sixty years' captivity, to return to their old home and rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem; and a fair proportion, though by no means the whole, had availed themselves of the privilege. Immediately after the return the altar of burnt-offering was erected upon its old site; and shortly afterwards the foundation of the new Temple was formally laid.

But disappointments followed. The half-caste Samaritans asked to be allowed to assist in rebuilding the Temple; and, being refused, became the determined opponents of the Jews, and succeeded in seriously interrupting the progress of the work. Nor was this all. The land had lain neglected for many years, and could not at once be brought into proper cultivation; as Haggai himself tells us, there was a succession of bad seasons. The people in general were impoverished and disappointed, though a certain number were prosperous enough to dwell in panelled houses. The author of the later chapters of Isaiah, a few years before, had drawn dazzling visions of the restoration: a triumphal progress of the exiles through the desert; Jerusalem resplendent with every glory; the nations of the earth envious of their happiness, and vying with one another in showing them honour and respect. The reality was a bitter disenchantment; the people were disheartened; they concluded that the wrath of God was not removed from them, and that the 'time had not yet come for the Lord's house to be built.'

This remissness in rebuilding God's house moved the souls of the two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah; and they exerted themselves to induce the people to proceed with the work. Haggai, in his first chapter, spoken in the second year of the Persian king Darius, retorts indignantly the people's words upon themselves: 'Is it time for *you* to dwell in your panelled houses, while this house lieth waste?' and he attributes the bad seasons and other misfortunes from which they had been suffering to their neglect. His words had such effect that three weeks later Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and the high priest, Joshua, and many of the leading Jews, felt themselves moved to begin the work.

2. This is an interesting historical story, and an interesting chapter of biography. Our chief concern, however, is with its point of contact with ourselves. The historical framework is obviously a dead thing; but inside that framework there are abiding ethical and spiritual values, and to translate the conditions of this time and the call of Haggai to the people, from national and external terms into individual and spiritual terms, is to find this ancient story still quick, and this old-time preacher still urgent.

The concern of religion, which was then national, we know now to be first individual; its demands, then external, we understand to be first inward and spiritual. We have listened to One who said 'the kingdom of God is within you.' How many beginnings in the life of faith, goodness, and service—bright, joyous, and full of expectancy—have dwindled through discouragement into indifference? Earlier experiences brought with them earnestness, zeal, and strenuousness, but these have evaporated. There are many who can look back to the time of a definite committal of themselves to God, which brought such a sense of emancipation as to be quite literally a home-coming out of exile, and then was their mouth filled with laughter and their lips with praise. Then was the time of projects to be carried through by sheer enthusiasm for Christ and goodness, and, above all, to build an inner sanctuary which should be as the holy of holies of the indwelling Spirit of the Highest, the centre and feeding spring of life and character.

How does the report read to-day? How compares now with then? One of the great evangelists has said: 'It is almost refreshing to have to do with a man who has never professed Jesus Christ before.' Yes, it is refreshing because the common condition is that of an external semblance still kept, but the fire gone out on the inner altar. Leave out of count the local colouring, get down to essentials and ask if these words of this old story do not describe the disappointing years, the meagre results. 'Ye have sown much, and bring in little.' 'Consider since the day that the foundation was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? Yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth.'

¶ Petrarch had a master, a man of real genius, so we gather, who made nothing of his talents because of a certain inertia and sluggishness of mind that he could never overcome. He dreamed great dreams, and planned large plans, often rose up intent on starting to them there and then, would actually begin, would write the title-page of some great work to be in a fair hand, with lovely curves and flourishes, and sometimes managed as far as the preface, setting down purposefully all that he was going to do. But there it always ended![1]

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[1] A. J. Gossip.

3. Let us see what it was that happened to these people. First, the task was harder than they dreamed, and the glow of spiritual ideas cooled before the cold reality of things. They could not endure hardness, and were discouraged because of the roughness of the way. Second, some had prospered in material things and were very comfortable in good homes. In their panelled houses what mattered it if the Lord's house were left unbuilt? They made money, and as Emerson has said, 'The worst of money is that it often costs so much.' Thirdly, the Samaritans sneered at them, and they grew ashamed of their toiling. They had to live with the outsider, and religious enthusiasm was not 'the thing' in their set. It is briefly and bluntly summarized. Has anything in it a point for us? Have we slacked because the call of God was something too laborious to answer? Is it true that earnestness and service decreased as we grew better off in this world's goods? Did we let the atmosphere of criticism and worldliness rot our ideals so that we came to feel it a little beneath us to do what we had once been proud to do?

That the mountain stream
Should end in mud
Methinks is melancholy.

It is time to ask questions, and for some it is high time to awake out of sleep.

4. Here is a man who was messenger of God to such conditions, and to such purpose did he speak that the aspect of things was changed and the false start redeemed. His first utterance was a summons out of their slackness and softness of living to stand upon their feet and get with strenuousness to a forsaken and almost forgotten duty. He bids them face the facts about themselves, and be done with self-excusings; then to the mountains to bring wood, and on the site of failure to build unto completion. It was an awakening call, and within three weeks the new fabric began to rise on the buried foundations laid in better days.

Notice the reiterated emphasis upon the stirring of the spirit of both leaders and people. 'And the Lord stirred up the *spirit* of Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, and the *spirit* of Joshua the high priest, and the *spirit* of all the remnant of the people.' The redemption of the false start must begin there, for it was there the mischief began. The new start will be worthless if it is not from inward sources. If we have lost glow and power so that we have grown disheartened, and our hands slack, is it not because we have lost touch with God? Losing touch with Him, men become the bond-slaves of mean things. Let us turn and seek Him, putting into the seeking both passion and principle, the whole fibre of our being. This redemption of a false start is no simple and easy matter. We must put our whole self into it with set determination of will Godward.

Haggai has another word to say. It was spoken when the people, whose conscience had been awakened so that they began to endeavour, grew depressed as comparisons forced themselves upon their minds. They were cast down in mind and said: 'This new temple will never be like unto the old.' Then this man, who could speak awakening words to the conscience, showed that he knew also how to speak a word in season to them that were weary. Let them not be faint-hearted; God will be with them and will make their unpretentious house greater in glory than the former. That word of heartening will be needed by those who are trying to do with their life what these discouraged people were attempting with bricks and mortar, and it is offered to them with far finer assurance than Haggai could offer it. His assured optimism was based on the sovereignty of God, while in Jesus Christ the basis of the soul's optimism is the love of God.

¶ One of Charles Reade's characters, the inimitable Frenchman Denys, in *The Cloister and the Hearth,* used to face every difficulty and danger with the cheerful words on his lips, 'Courage, camarade, le diable est mort.' The prophets of Israel did not say that; in truth, not one of them ever mentions the devil at all. But each of them did say, 'Courage, for the Lord liveth, and He is with you.' 'Best of all,' as John Wesley used to say, 'God is with us.'

To Haggai the brightness and wealth of the future is for a people; in Jesus Christ it is for the one child who has gone out of the way. He is our Helper as we take up this unused beginning, and with Him we may bring it to rich completions. He will use the thought of unprofitable years to spur to intensity and urgency, and His grace, granted in repentance, shall infuse into the character new steadfastness and strength.

Betting and Gambling

Haggai i. 6.—'He that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.'

The words of the text are taken from the rebuke which Haggai delivered to the people. Their first meaning is this, that in the famine prices were so high that, even if a man did in such hard times earn good wages, the cost of food, of clothing, of everything, was so great that the money soon disappeared. It seemed to be thrown into a bag pierced with holes; or, as we say, it was as when water is poured into a sieve.

In many cases that rapid disappearance of the wages through the bag with holes is unavoidable. Trade may be dull and work may be scarce; or things may be so dear that even what may be considered good wages cannot be made to go far. The most thrifty and economical are often amazed to find how rapidly the earnings go, for this, for that, for something else; but all necessary to comfortable and decent existence.

But the bag with holes is sometimes a matter of deliberate choice. It would be hard to find any figure which furnishes a more apt description of what happens when a working man, the wage-earner, allows himself to be mastered by the passion for betting and gambling which is so widespread an evil at the present time. Mr Philip Snowden has said: 'Gambling is the distinctive vice of our age,' and there can be little doubt that he is right. It is, beyond even drink, the chief cause of poverty, of suffering among children, and trouble between married people.

¶ Canon Peter Green gives this story: 'I was talking one day,' he says, 'to a woman who had asked me for relief, and was telling her that I had no inclination to help her while she was betting. When she denied doing so I said, "I wonder what good you think there is in telling these lies to me when every boy that sells the 'One o'clock' (*i.e.* the special sporting edition of the evening paper, published each race day at 10 a.m.) in this district is a member of my ragged school class?" Instantly the woman flushed up, and said angrily, "What has that boy Norman been saying about me?" "Oh! it's Norman, is it!" I said, "whom we get our 'One o'clock' from?" No one had told me anything, but the signs of gambling were altogether too obvious to be missed. And those signs can be seen daily in any number of poverty-stricken houses. As one poor woman said to a lady worker recently, "Wages and all are so bad one has to do something to make a bit extra." And the delusion that it is possible to "spoil the bookie," and to make money by betting, simply leads them deeper and deeper into the mire.'

1. Let us be clear as to what we mean by gambling. This is how it is defined by Herbert Spencer: 'Gambling is a kind of action by which pleasure is obtained at the cost of pain to another. It affords no equivalent to the general good; the happiness of the winner implies the misery of the loser.' Bishop Westcott objected to gambling on somewhat similar lines: 'Gambling is seeking habitually, at the cost of others, but with their consent (so far as they seek the same end), personal gain, or excitement, in excess of the value of the effort, without adding anything to the common wealth.' A simpler definition is made by Bishop Moorhouse, who sees the spring of gambling in 'the desire to possess one's self of the property of another, without giving to that other any adequate value or service. The essence of sin is selfishness, and gambling is of the very essence of selfishness.'

Many people suppose that the nature of a gamble consists in the fact that chance is involved. But there is chance in everything in life. If the presence of chance in any transaction made it a gamble the really idiotic contention of a prominent Member of Parliament that 'all life is a gamble; business is a gamble, marriage is a gamble' would be true. But the true characteristic of a gamble lies in this, that there is no increase of wealth possible, so that the community does not benefit in any way, but the gain of one party is the loss of the other party. A commercial venture may be in the highest degree speculative, and yet not be a true gamble. For instance, a company might be formed to extract radium from sea-water. It would be an extremely hazardous venture, and anyone taking shares would run a very good chance of losing all he put into it. But if it proved successful there would be increase of wealth. The community would benefit by increased supplies of radium. The shareholders would get dividends. It is most important that people should realize the distinction between a true gamble and a merely risky and hazardous venture. For when a distinguished economist said some years ago that the gambling spirit was essential to industry and had made England what she is, he had in mind, undoubtedly, the spirit that is prepared to take risks and to make dangerous experiments. He had not in mind the spirit that tries to get something for nothing, and that leads a man to waste time and energy on that which can add nothing to the general well-being of the community.

2. Now let us glance briefly at some of the evils which arise from indulgence in gambling. To begin with, we are making an unjustifiable risk of those things which are God's gift and God's trust to us. The question is very plausible, May I not do what I will with my own? But the answer is quite definite. No; we certainly may not. Nothing is ours in the sense that we are absolved from responsibility in our use of it. It is quite true that this will apply in other quarters than gambling. But it applies specially to gambling, for, as has been said, it is unreasonable 'to risk the things entrusted to us by God on the cast of a die, the turn of a card, or the pace of a horse.' Next, gambling fosters idleness and creates a dislike for that honest labour which is one of the best disciplines of life. It is a very frequent complaint that the steady industry of the British race is a thing of the past. Furthermore, it spoils manly sports and innocent games, not only by throwing into the background the wholesome rivalry of games as an end in itself, but by introducing an element which speedily leads to degeneration through corrupt and dishonourable practices. We may add to this indictment that the gambling passion has a special power of deadening the moral life and making men and women careless of all higher things. One has only to watch the faces in the Casino at Monte Carlo, or in the Bourse at Paris during a fever of speculation, to realize how greed and base excitement can distort and disfigure the human countenance.

¶ Mr Paul Ketchiva, who was for many years a croupier at Monte Carlo, writes: 'Anyone who thinks he can visit a casino and take away a fortune—and keep it—is living in a fool's paradise.'

'Gambling is a half-brother to the devil.'

And he ends his book[1] by quoting Talleyrand's famous comment, 'Of all the human emotions none is so productive of evil and immorality as gambling.'

¶ Few books of its kind are more interesting than Greville's *Memoirs*, and very striking are the passages in which again and again he confides to the pages of his private diary his loathing and detestation of the habit he had allowed himself to contract, and his consciousness of his degradation and deterioration from it. His life, he says, was 'spent in the alternations of excitement from the amusement and speculation of the turf, and of remorse and shame at the pursuit itself.' 'Nothing,' he says elsewhere, 'but the hope of gain would induce me to go through this demoralizing drudgery, which I am conscious reduces me to the level of all that is most disreputable and despicable, for my thoughts are eternally absorbed by it. It is like dram-drinking; having once entered upon it, I cannot leave it off.'[2]

3. When we consider these facts, the need for rousing a strong public opinion against gambling in every form must be apparent. Before the slave could be set free the early abolitionists had to create a public opinion against negro slavery. Before the disgusting and shameless drunkenness of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries could be replaced by cleaner and healthier manners, the early temperance reformers had to preach, alike by word and by example, the obligation of higher standards. And so it will be with gambling. It is not likely that this vice, any more than any other to which frail human nature is liable, will ever be wholly eradicated. There is no reason why an immense improvement should not be effected, and that improvement will be effected, if effected at all, only when a better public opinion on the whole subject has been aroused. And it is to that task that the Christian Church must address itself with all its power.

Let us make it plain that we Christian people count gambling, just as we do drunkenness, not as a fashionable failing or an amiable weakness but as a breach of the law of right and wrong, a violation of the Christian principles of stewardship, of industry, and of love. And let the Church herself abstain from all suspicion of countenancing, for her own profit, the gambling spirit, by avoiding all raffles, ballots, and guessing competitions at bazaars, and so 'avoid all appearance of evil.'

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[1] *Confessions of a Croupier.*

[2] E. C. S. Gibson.

The Church of the Future

Haggai ii. 4-9.—'Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts: According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.'

This prophecy of Haggai is spoken for the encouragement of the people who had begun to be despondent as they compared the old Temple, or their memories of the old Temple, with the promise of the new that was at present before their eyes. God reminds them of His own faithfulness, and gives them special promises in connection with the new building; and He gives them this strong exhortation to take heart and to work. The prophecy is dated quite precisely, in the seventh month, on the one and twentieth day of the month. That was the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, and ought to have been the most joyful day in the Jewish calendar, but perhaps just because of the festival character of the day, the rather doleful circumstances of the Jews impressed themselves the more upon their minds, and made it more necessary that they should receive a word of encouragement like this from God.

1. There is the encouragement that God in this prophecy gives to Israel, and to us when we think of the work to which He calls us. First of all there is the great encouragement contained in the fact that God has made a 'covenant' with His people. The word carried back the minds of the Israelites to the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, when God entered into the history of Israel, and took that people to be His people and pledged Himself to be their God. The covenant which God makes with men is a kind of relation into which God enters with men by which His faithfulness and love are pledged to them. Now, when *we* think of the work to which God calls us, and especially when we are tempted to despondency, the thing we have to remember, the thing to which we have to go back, is the Cross of Christ. The death of Christ is the pledge that God has given us of a love from which He can never retreat. And we feel that, if we deal truly with God, if we are faithful to Him as He is faithful to us, our life must be and can be something Divinely great. And let appearances in the Christian Church be never so mean, let the things that we see with our eyes at any particular time be as discouraging as we please, that does not alter the fact that the Church is built upon the Cross of Jesus Christ, that it has the people that God has made His own by the blood of the everlasting covenant, that it has God with it and infinite possibilities of service put within its reach; and when we remember that, and fall back upon it, surely we shall feel that we are called to do everything we can for the cause of God and His people, and that nothing we can do is too much or too good for Him.

2. But God gives special promises. Besides recalling to Israel the memory of His covenant, He tells them that the great days to which they look back will be renewed, and far more than renewed. God had shaken Mount Sinai in the past when He had delivered the Law to Moses; 'but yet once more' and He would shake not the earth only but the heavens also, and as a result of that shaking all the nations of the earth would fear the Lord and bring their most costly treasures to His Temple. 'The desire of all nations shall come.' We apply that expression to the Lord Jesus Christ, and that application goes back as far as the Latin Bible, where a mistranslation gave origin to it; and we are loth to give up such a beautiful name and true for Jesus. He *is* the Desire of all nations. And yet the prophet was not meaning that. The word translated 'desire' is a collective word, and it means 'the desirable things' of all the nations shall come. God will stir the nations and they will bring to His house everything on

which they set store, and though the house looks a bare, poor, unfurnished, desolate house at present, it will be adorned with the wealth of all peoples.

¶ This prophecy was literally fulfilled in the wonderful gifts that were given to the Temple not only by Artaxerxes and Darius, but in later days by many foreign princes who came to Jerusalem moved by an intense curiosity in and a wistful admiration of her wonderful history and literature. But above all it was fulfilled by the strangest of all benefactors, the cruel Herod the Great, who lavished his treasures on its restoration. Enriched both by him and by the gifts of the wealthy Jews of the Dispersion, the Temple became at the Christian era a worthy rival to the glory of Solomon's house.

What does it mean now when God says to us, 'The desire of all nations shall come'? It means that everything on which human beings set value will be bestowed, and ought to be bestowed, on the enrichment and service of the Church. If we think what the history of the Church has been it will help us to see the meaning of that promise. Bishop Westcott has pointed out that there have been three great epochs in the history of the Christian Church. First, there was the time when the great creeds of the Church were constructed, the time when the Church built up the Christian doctrine of God, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, the Christian doctrine of the Person of Christ, such as we find them in the great creeds accepted by all Christians. What did that mean? That meant the consecration of the Greek genius to the enrichment and service of the Church. It meant that all that the Greek race prized most—intellect, philosophy, mental subtlety, and comprehensiveness—was bestowed unreservedly and freely on the service of the Christian faith. Then we come to a different period. The great society of the ancient world crumbled into pieces, and as that old social order was dissolved the Christian society consolidated itself in its place, and a Catholic Church arose, covering all the civilized world of the time—a Church with one uniform government and one visible head, a Church that gathered into itself all that had been characteristic of the old Roman world. And that meant the consecration of the Roman genius to the Christian Church. All that was meant by law, and order, and discipline, and organization, and collective strength, and majesty was bestowed on the adornment of the house of God. And then since the Reformation we have had another epoch in the history of the Church. The Orthodox and the Catholic have been succeeded by the Evangelic Church, which has found its place and career among the free, expansive, aggressive peoples of Northern Europe and America. What these nations value most is individual liberty—the sense of personal responsibility. And what Evangelical Christianity means is that the genius of the Northern peoples of Europe—the Teutonic genius we might call it—has been bestowed for the enrichment and strength of the house of God.

In that way, age after age, as the gospel has invaded and conquered one branch of the human race after another, the dearest spiritual possession of that race—its intellect, or its sense for government, or its apprehension of liberty and responsibility—has been taken into the Church and made part of its strength and of its beauty. And that process has not finished the prophecy. When the gospel goes further and subdues the intelligence of India, or the patience of China, or the fervour of Africa—when the gospel gets possession of these nations, then these also will be laid at the feet of Christ; they will all enter into the resources of the Church for the doing of God's work in the world.

¶ When the Spirit takes hold of each national genius what a wonderful symphony it will be!—the love of truth of the Anglo-Saxon, the deep thoroughness of the Teuton, the passion for sharing of the Slav, the love of beauty and art of the Latin, the oak-strength of the Scandinavian, the music-loving gay spirit of the African, the matter-of-fact reasonable outlook of the Chinese, the gracious spirit of the Japanese, the profound mysticism of the Hindu—each giving its peculiar manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.[1]

3. Now, when we see that, we see not only the promise of God, but also a suggestion of our own duty. Whose fault is it that the Church is imperfect, and bare, and unadorned, and unattractive? It is in great part our fault. God expects our best for it, not the things we do not care for, but the things our hearts are set on. He expects our gold and

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[1] E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of Every Road*, 140.

silver. He expects our youth. He expects our best men, the most gifted in head and heart, in mind and affection, to offer themselves for His work in the world. If men realize the foundation on which God is building the Church, and the height to which He has promised to raise it, should not all men, the most gifted men, the best men, feel that the Church has a right to claim the very best that any society can give? And those who are in the Church and serving it ought to feel that if anything claims fidelity the Church claims it, and that God looks to be served, not with less earnestness or less zeal than we serve other causes, but with the very best of which our nature is capable.

4. There are two things God says He will do, in connection with the Church, that we must remember. He says, 'I will fill this house with glory.' It looked a bare and unpromising place, but God assures His people it will have a splendour answering to its purpose. And our Church will be a glorious place also when we bring into it everything that is dear to us, and when we consecrate all to our God. The Church is full of glory when it is full of people who belong to God, and who keep back nothing from Him; when it is full of young men and women who are giving the strength of their youth to Christ; when it is full of people who are matured in their Christian experience, and eager to help their fellow-men, and when the old people are still able to say, 'He is faithful that promised.'

Again, He says, 'In this place will I give peace.' Now, peace may seem a little gift after glory, but God knows best, and there are probably few things that do more to bring people into the house of God than just the hope of peace. These poor Jews were harassed with their enemies, and it would be a comforting thought to them when they were in the house of God that they were in sanctuary and in a safe place. And what a blessing the Church is, even if it were nothing else than just a quiet place with an open door and a call to prayer. And yet we do not get peace just by escaping from the world into a peaceful building; we never get it by trying to escape the restlessness, and worry, and sin of our common life. Peace is a gift of God. It can only be obtained from God. It can only be obtained when we come face to face with God.

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

INTRODUCTION

I

The Historical Background

Zechariah was a prophet of the sixth century b.c.—a century of tremendous happenings for the little kingdom of Judah. And not for Judah only, for such a period of the rise and fall of mighty empires the world has rarely seen. Shortly before the century opened the cataclysm had already begun with the fall of Nineveh in 612. The dreaded Assyrian power, whose hand Judah, like other Syrian principalities, had felt, was mortally stricken. The Babylonians and Medes had triumphed. Yet Judah was not in a position to rejoice when, its capital lost, the Assyrian empire made its last stand and ebbed out its life on the upper waters of the Euphrates. The rod of the oppressor had merely changed hands. The Egyptians advanced to Carchemish to assist the Assyrians, and Josiah of Judah met a long lamented death in opposing them at Megiddo.

Nebuchadrezzar, the son of Nabopolassar, was at the head of the Babylonian army against the West. He proved himself a redoubtable and skilful general, and Egypt was soon driven back to her own borders. On the death of his father Nebuchadrezzar became king of Babylonia in 605. Judah, not realizing the strength of the new power, remained under Egyptian influence. Johoiakim, the nominee of the Egyptian monarch, offered opposition to Babylon, and the sixth century opened with the first siege and capture of Jerusalem in 597, when certain notable Jews were transported to Babylon. In the year 588 there came to the Egyptian throne one Apries, a wild, headstrong monarch with pronounced Greek sympathies, who maintained his throne by the aid of Greek mercenaries. He apparently impressed the Jews with his display of power, and by demonstrating with his fleet against Phœnicia, then occupied by Babylon, he encouraged the Jews under Zedekiah to revolt against Nebuchadrezzar. In 586 Jerusalem was taken a second time. The Temple, the city walls, the houses were levelled with the ground. A large proportion of the remaining inhabitants was carried away to Babylon.

We pass rapidly over the years that supervened on the destruction of Jerusalem. Nebuchadrezzar died in 562 and the empire he had done so much to build fell away under a succession of weak monarchs, and soon there came from the East the menace of Persia. In 550 Babylon's ancient allies against the Assyrians, the Medes, were conquered by the Persian king Cyrus. Babylonia, Egypt, Lydia and Sparta —strange bed-fellows whom only the threat of a common danger could bring together—joined forces against the new invader. In 546 Crœsus of Lydia rashly provoked his fate, and soon thereafter Western Anatolia and Ionia were in Persian power. With the fall of Babylon in 539 the whole of Syria and Palestine passed from Babylonian to Persian rule, under Cyrus.

This was an event of supreme importance to the Jewish colony in Babylonia. The good name of the Persian ruler for magnanimity and religious toleration which had preceded him raised high hopes. It seems to have inspired an exalted literature (*e.g.* Is. xliv. 21 ff.) in those who recognized in Cyrus the great deliverer for whose advent the Jewish nation had long been straining its eyes. The first Jewish return is dated in his first year (2 Ch. xxxvi. 22 f., Ezr. i. 1 ff.). Cyrus died in 530 or 529, probably the latter year, and was succeeded by Cambyses his son. Cambyses swept westwards in 526, conquered at Pelusium the Egyptian army—at that time composed mainly of Greek and Carian mercenaries—and captured Psamatik III. It is important to note that Cambyses seems to have adopted in general the same pacific attitude towards conquered peoples and their gods as Cyrus, since it has been contended that his policy was just the reverse and had a serious effect on the activities of the returned exiles. According to an Egyptian record, nearly contemporary, Cambyses placated the Egyptians by assuming their royal dignity, recognizing their gods, and renovating and endowing their temples.[1]

Cambyses was succeeded on the throne by Darius Hystaspis, from another branch of the Achæmenid family. At once, as was to be expected, the far-flung empire seethed up in rebellion, and Darius was faced, in the first three years of his reign, with revolt in all his eastern provinces. He faced a terrifying situation with amazing courage and vigour, and was ably supported by his military leaders. The situation was saved. He consolidated the empire and proved himself a far-seeing statesman and a high-minded legislator and organizer. The attitude of Darius to subject peoples and their religions was no less conciliatory than that of his Persian predecessors. Indeed it appears to have been a traditional Persian policy. There is, then, nothing inherently improbable in the recorded accounts of the permission given to the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem either by Cyrus or Artaxerxes, or in the support accorded them by Darius.

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[1] W. M. Flinders Petrie, *History of Egypt*, iii. 360 ff.

II

The Rebuilding of the Temple and Walls

As the immediate purpose of Zechariah's prophetic activity was the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem, we must direct attention to this point. Exiled, as we have seen, at the beginning of the sixth century, the Jews, we are told, returned in numbers towards its close. They directed their efforts first of all to the restoration of the Temple and its ritual, and only later to rebuilding the city walls. There has been some confusion in the Book of Ezra between these two main activities, and the chronological order of the subject matter has been in consequence disturbed. Both the date and the manner of the return of the exiles have been made matters of keen debate. According to the account given at the end of the Second Book of Chronicles and repeated at the beginning of Ezra, Cyrus, by a decree issued in his first year (539), permitted and encouraged the Jews to return from Babylon to Jerusalem. We are led there to believe that they returned in force, the numbers being variously estimated at from forty to fifty thousand. According to the chronicler to whom the Book of Ezra must be attributed, building operations were commenced shortly after the exiles reached Jerusalem (Ezr. iii.). The altar was erected and preparations set on foot for building the main fabric. But opposition came from the people of the land, whose plea to be permitted to co-operate in the work had been rejected. By their intervention and intrigues the work had eventually to be suspended until the year 520, the second year of Darius. In that year, with the aid of a strongly-worded decree (Ezr. vi. 6 ff.) as the active support of that monarch against a similar intrigue, urged on by Haggai and Zechariah, the work was taken up again with renewed vigour, and the Temple was finished four years later. It is not stated that there was a fresh migration from Babylon at the time of Darius' decree, but it seems not improbable that Haggai and Zechariah may have come from Babylon for the express purpose of prophesying to the 'Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem.' There was a return under Ezra the scribe, following a decree of Artaxerxes I (Ezr. vii., viii.) in the year 458.

Some critics have questioned whether there was a return under Cyrus, and doubts have been cast on the authenticity of the proclamation issued by him (2 Ch. xxxvi. 22 ff., Ezr. i. 1 ff.). Objection has been taken to its form as at variance with official Persian edicts of the period, and to the fact that Cyrus' reference to Yahweh as the 'god of heaven' contradicts his ascription of supremacy amongst the gods to Marduk, god of Babylon. In it Sheshbazzar is governor of Judah, whilst in the Book of Haggai we find that post occupied at or near the same time by Zerubbabel (Hag. i. 1). It is also argued that Haggai and Zechariah, whose books are contemporary documents, give no hint that they know of any such large migration in the first year of Cyrus. In refutation of these arguments it has been pointed out that the generosity and religious toleration of Cyrus were well known. The proclamation, if not in the exact form, is at least in the spirit, of Persian decrees recognized as authentic, and produces a strong impression of genuineness. That Yahweh is called 'god of heaven' does not necessarily imply a recognition of supremacy. Sheshbazzar may have been a Persian title for Zerubbabel, or Sheshbazzar may have been appointed only to supervise the return of the exile train to Jerusalem, then for this, or some other reason, disappeared forthwith from the stage. There was, also, no occasion for Haggai and Zechariah to make mention of a return. They took it as part of the existing situation, requiring no comment. The denial of a return under Cyrus on a large scale would imply either that the return of the Jews following his accession to the throne was unorganized and desultory, or that those who had never left the neighbourhood of Jerusalem were responsible for the rebuilding. This latter view, advocated by a Dutch scholar, Dr Kosters, has not found acceptance.

The weight of evidence and the consensus of critical opinion favour the view that there was a substantial return in 538-7, with desultory communication maintained with Babylon for the next fifteen years. There was an early attempt at rebuilding in the first flush of enthusiasm, which did not, perhaps, extend far beyond repairing the altar and clearing the area. A succession of bad harvests, financial difficulties, the opposition from the inhabitants on the spot, the requirements, perhaps, of Cambyses' expedition against Egypt, which would take its toll in men and supplies, led to the easing off and temporary abandonment of building operations. They were resumed when Darius I came to the throne, and brought to completion at the instigation of Haggai and Zechariah.

III

ZECHARIAH THE PROPHET

Into this troubled scene comes Zechariah the prophet. Of the person of Zechariah we know little. We are introduced to him in the full vigour of his prophetic work at Jerusalem in the year 520. He tells us (i. 1) that he was the son of Berechiah and grandson of Iddo. In Ezr. v. 1 he is called the 'son of Iddo,' but as 'son' is used elsewhere for 'grandson' (*e.g.* Gn. xxix. 5), no stress need be laid on this apparent discrepancy. An Iddo appears amongst the priests and Levites who went up with Zerubbabel and Joshua (Neh. xii. 4). He is generally regarded as one and the same person with the Iddo of the Book of Zechariah. Nehemiah tells us that Zechariah of Iddo was a priest (xii. 16). If this be our Zechariah, as there is some reason to believe, then he was both prophet and priest. If Zechariah was grandson to Iddo and his grandfather was still alive when the return under Zerubbabel took place, then he must have been a mere child at that time and can have been only a young man when engaged in his prophetic task. But perhaps, as has been suggested, 'son of Berechiah' in i. 1 is an interpolation due to a mistaken identification with Zechariah, 'son of Jeberechiah' (Is. viii. 2), contracted to Berechiah in Zech. i. 1. The soundest view seems to be that Zechariah was the son of Iddo and was in early middle life when engaged as a prophet at Jerusalem, and that he continued to function as a priest under Joiakim, son of Joshua (Neh. xii. 16), after his prophetic life and the necessity for it ceased. Zechariah's prophetic activity lasted slightly longer than Haggai's. He was probably the younger man as Haggai had the precedence.

IV

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

The Book falls into two parts: (*A*) chapters i.–viii., which modern scholarship accepts as the work of the prophet, and (*B*) chapters ix.–xiv., which are not so accepted, and to which the name Deutero-Zechariah is often attached. The reasons for distinguishing the two parts may be given briefly. In the first part the prophecies are dated, there are visions, the first personal pronoun is used. In the second part there is no dating, there are no visions, the first person is used only in one passage (xi. 4 ff.), where its use is suspect. The two parts differ in literary form, in their ethics. The first part breathes the spirit and conditions of the end of the sixth century B.C., but that cannot be said of the second part. Part one shows familiarity with the former prophets; part two seems to borrow largely from them. Part one has a strain of apocalyptic; part two is strongly apocalyptic.

Part (*A*) consists of at least five sections.

1. An introduction, giving Zechariah's commission to speak to the people inviting them to return to the Lord who will return unto them. The 'former prophets' spoke to deaf ears but the warnings they uttered have been fulfilled in calamities. People and prophets pass away but God's words and statutes endure. It is dated the eighth month in the second year of Darius, *i.e.* October–November 520 B.C. (i. 1–6).

2. There follow eight night visions accompanied by their interpretations dated January–February 520 B.C. (1) The Four Horsemen among the myrtle trees. They report the earth at rest. God indicates His renewed interest in Jerusalem (i. 7–17). (2) The Four Horns and

the Four Smiths, symbolizing the dispersion of Judah and the punishment of the nations who brought it about (i. 8–21). (3) The Man with the Measuring-Cord: a new Jerusalem spreading beyond its walls will come into being. Yahweh will be both its glory and its protection. Follows a summons to Zion to escape from Babylon (ii. 1–9). Then comes ii. 10–13, a piece of lyric prose. (4) Joshua and his adversary, Satan, standing before the angel of the Lord. Satan is rebuked and Joshua cleansed of his filthy garments, symbolizing the cleansing of the land from iniquity (ch. iii.). (5) The Seven-Branched Lamp flanked by olive trees, the 'sons of oil' Joshua and Zerubbabel (iv. 1–6*a*, 10*b*–14): from iv. 6*b*–10*a* a 'word' of Yahweh to Zerubbabel. (6) The Flying Scroll: Yahweh's curse carried out against individual thieves and false-swearers (v. 1–4). (7) The Bushel Measure and the Woman: the transportation of the wickedness of the land in the form of a woman to an appropriate home in Babylonia (v. 5–11). (8) The Four Chariots: the winds bringing God's spirit (of anger) to bear on the North country (vi. 1–8).

3. The remaining verses of the sixth chapter (9–15) are a 'word' of Yahweh concerning the crowning of Joshua (perhaps originally in the text Zerubbabel).

4. In chapter vii. we have a 'word' of Yahweh, dated November–December 518 B.C., in response to an inquiry from Bethel for direction concerning the fasts held locally during the years of exile (vii. 1–7). The remaining verses are a 'word' of Yahweh reiterating the teaching of the former prophets which the former inhabitants rejected and suffered in consequence (vii. 8–14).

5. In chapter viii. we have a number of undated oracles. They appear to number ten in all, introduced by the phrase 'thus saith the Lord.' That number is now by fairly general consent reduced to three, namely viii. 1–8, the promise of the future; viii. 9–17, contrast of the past and the future; viii. 18–23, a season of joy and gladness will displace mourning and fasting. Some scholars include vii. 4–14 in this category as oracles embodying the lessons of the past.

(*B*) Chapters ix.–xiv. consist of a collection of undated oracles of indeterminate authorship. Although there is no consensus of opinion two main divisions of Deutero-Zechariah are accepted by the majority of scholars, namely (1) ix. 1–xi. 3 and (2) xi. 4–xiv. 21. In (1) we have a 'burden' depicting, seemingly, the inauguration of Yahweh's rule, the reassembling of Judah and Joseph as though they had not been cast off, and the overthrow of the world power (ix. 1–xi. 3). In (2) the section xi. 4–xiii. 9 pictures the attack of the nations on Jerusalem at the end of the days, and its wonderful deliverance and restoration to Divine favour. In chapter xiv. we have a second description of the last onslaught of the nations against Jerusalem. It is repelled by Yahweh, who exacts a terrible vengeance. His Kingdom is established and the nations repair to Jerusalem to worship Him.

The kernel of the Book would appear to be the series of visions (i. 7–vi. 8), no doubt originally an independent document. Certain 'words' (i. 16 f., ii. 6–13, iii. 7–10, iv. 6–10*a*, vi. 9–15) disturb the uniformity of the visions. They have a bearing on them but are not essential to them. There is every reason to believe that these oracles are from the hand of Zechariah and have been inserted in the visions either by him or a redactor. Perhaps chapters vii. and viii. were originally part of an oracles document. They appear to be a later addition to the Book, as was also the introduction. Furthermore, some critics think that certain redactional interpolations were made before the text became rigid, *e.g.* the passages where Zechariah repeats that Yahweh sent him (ii. 8, 9, 11; iv. 9; vi. 15), all of which can be removed from the text without causing the least ripple on its smooth flowing. Again, the hand of the redactor seems traceable in the use of the third person in i. 1, 7; vii. 1, 8 (viii. 1), and in the substitution of Joshua for Zerubbabel in iii. 9 and in vi. 9–14. This latter change must date from a time when it was seen that supreme power was destined after all to be vested in the High Priest.

Of the authorship of Deutero-Zechariah nothing definite can be said. It consists of a strange mixture of materials arranged with some ingenuity in a rough subject classification. Whether it is the product of one hand, two hands, or several, whether its date is before or after the Exile, or partly one and partly the other, cannot be determined. Whilst strong arguments can be advanced for either a pre-exilic or a post-exilic date for the parts of which Deutero-Zechariah is composed, modern criticism is much disposed to favour the latter.

V

The Teaching of Zechariah

We are naturally concerned here mainly with the teaching of chapters i.–viii. To Zechariah, Yahweh is more transcendent than He is to Amos or Isaiah or even to Ezekiel. He is surrounded by spiritual beings. He no longer speaks directly to His prophets, and Zechariah does not behold Him even vaguely. He holds converse through an intermediary angel, and the visions He sends are similarly interpreted. The first of the lessons emphasized by the prophet is the permanence and unchangeableness of Yahweh's words and statutes. Yahweh's word, once uttered, persists for ever. Men may pass away and prophets depart, but not so Yahweh's word, for behind it is the eternal unchangeable God. Yahweh is confronted with the fallibility and variability of man, of those whom He has chosen as His own. He cannot revoke His word, but meets the challenge with mercy and forgiveness. He is long-suffering, feels grieved at the declension of His people, and is anxious to re-establish communion. 'Return unto me and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts' (i. 3). Judah is Yahweh's portion in the holy land (ii. 12). It is at Jerusalem that Yahweh will make His glory to appear on earth. In Jerusalem will His house be built (i. 16). No need for city walls. He will be a wall of fire, and His glory will dwell in her midst (ii. 5).

To Zechariah Yahweh is omnipotent. His glory may appear at Jerusalem, where He may be said to dwell, but in His heavenly domain His power is unrestricted. His hand can reach the nations afar off. They move at His bidding. 'In that day,' in the apocalyptic future when He comes, the nations will be anxious to join themselves to the Lord (ii. 11) and to entreat His favour (viii. 20 ff.), to court even the favour of the Jews because of the very rumour that Yahweh is with them (viii. 23). To Zechariah apocalyptist it is a new Jerusalem that awaits Yahweh, an enlarged Jerusalem spreading far beyond its walls (ii. 4), a prosperous city (i. 17). 'In that day' there shall be occasion for rejoicing (ii. 10), not fear before a great and terrible day of the Lord. Yahweh shall come bringing peace and salvation. The new Jerusalem will enjoy a peaceful development. In the streets old folks leaning on sticks, and children at play (viii. 4 f.). Changed will it be from the days of desolation and ruin, or even from the disturbed days of rebuilding, when mainly men in their prime were gathered there. Law and order will reign; rapine will cease (viii. 10); the land will be cultivated and blessed from heaven (viii. 12).

But these blessings are not to be enjoyed save by a purified people, the sanctified remnant (viii. 12), who are accepted by Yahweh on certain conditions. They must hearken to His prophet and turn from their evil ways (i. 3 ff.). There shall be a purging of the land especially of the prevalent evils of thieving and false swearing. *Individuals* will bear the consequences of their own guilt (v. 1 ff.). Wickedness, not particularized, will be removed from the land, as part of the process of purification (v. 5 ff.). There are two passages (vii. 9 f., viii. 16 f.) embodying the requirements of Yahweh. They are substantially the same, for viii. 16 f. includes vii. 9 f. 'Speak ye every man the truth with his neighbour: execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates (*i.e.* show mercy and compassion every man to his brother and oppress not (by abuse of law) the widow, the fatherless, the stranger, the poor (vii. 9 f.); and let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath' (viii. 16 f.). The last stipulation is not contained in vii. 9 f. but is emphasized in the purging of the land (v. 3 f). 'Love truth and peace' (viii. 19) is Yahweh's injunction. 'They shall be my people, and I will be their God in truth and righteousness' (viii. 8).

And through it all runs the idea that a Messianic figure will be at their head to direct them. Zerubbabel (iv. 6 ff.) it will be (as also in Haggai), or the purified Joshua (iii. 1 ff.), or both together, the 'two sons of oil' (iv. 14). It seems probable that Zerubbabel, 'the Branch' (iii. 9, vi. 12), was the leader Zechariah had in view and that the prominence given to Joshua is due to a later redactor who was privileged to witness the altered course of events. The Messianic figure, or rather figures, are, however, not forced to the foreground. They are leaders of the people to be purified as even the people. They do not dominate the stage. They are instruments for the building of the Temple, the necessary antecedent condition for Yahweh's presence with His people. Zechariah is too near them to idealize them extravagantly. Zerubbabel was to finish, as his hands had laid the foundation of, the Temple (iv. 9), the 'Branch' is to build the Temple (vi. 12), and people from afar off were to come to assist in building (vi. 15), and the hands of the believers are to be strong to build (viii. 9). The apocalyptic vein which runs through much of the Book is for apocalyptic essentially moderate. The new Jerusalem is not a dream city, an extravagant figment of the imagination, but a workaday city in a matter-of-fact world. It is a city where old men lean on their sticks and where the noisy laughter of children at play can be heard. It is not a city of the distant and nebulous future, but a city whose materialization is close at hand, indeed is in process of accomplishment; a city where the foreigner will jostle the Jew, to snatch at and share his privileges. Similarly, Zechariah's Messianic figures are not dream figures. They are historical personages whom he names, and whose activities come under his own observation.

Zechariah's Book breathes consolation and peace. Yahweh, as Zechariah depicts Him, is a God who attracts. Although Zechariah does not say so directly, Yahweh is to him a stern but loving God. No better insight to Zechariah's own personality can be given than his own Book presents. The pleasing qualities which he himself possessed are reflected in the greater light of the God he reveals.

We cannot close without a short reference to Deutero-Zechariah. Where we have a not inconsiderable number of independent documents, as we believe to be the case here, there can be no question of a 'message.' We may, however, refer to certain features which characterize these chapters. The Yahweh of Deutero-Zechariah is not the God of chapters i.–viii., who loves truth and peace and will be so worshipped. There is a strain of bitterness running through the whole, and developing in parts into savagery (*cf.* ix. 15, x. 4 f., xi. 9, xii. 4 f., xiii. 7 f., xiv. 12), the reflection of times that were evil. The Philistines, who are to join Judah in the worship of Yahweh, are not brought to Him by peaceful persuasion; 'I will take away his blood out of his mouth and his abominations from between his teeth' (ix. 7). Yahweh is a God of war, a stern and angry God: 'Awake, O sword' (xiii. 7) might stand appropriately as the keynote to the whole collection.

In chapter xii. Jerusalem is a burdensome stone for all peoples (xii. 3). It shall occupy its place when the nations that come against it are destroyed. 'In that day,' instead of the joy and gladness of Zechariah's city, there shall be universal mourning (xii. 11 ff.). Instead of the people undergoing a moral reformation there is a ritualistic purification, a fountain is opened for sin and uncleanness (xiii. 1). In chapter xiv. there is an apocalyptic vision of Jerusalem taken and spoiled, a Jerusalem of the imagination perched on its rock in the middle of a depressed plain. To it the remnant of the warring nations shall go up to worship under threat of famine and plague, a Jerusalem full to overflowing at the Feast of the Tabernacles. Like a pearl in an oyster is the lyric depicting the coming of a king in humble state to Jerusalem, bringing salvation and peace (ix. 9 f.). In general, earlier prophecy has left its mark deeply impressed and Levitical influence is strongly marked. Altogether we breathe another atmosphere in Deutero-Zechariah. To pass from chapters i.–viii. to chapters ix.–xiv. is to pass suddenly from the calm of a summer's evening to the inclemency of a winter's afternoon.

Edward Robertson

The City without Walls

Zech. ii. 1-5.—'I lifted up mine eyes again, and looked, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof. And, behold, the angel that talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him, And said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.'

The new Jerusalem was the problem of the hour: How was it to be built up? How were the prophecies to be fulfilled? The idea of the Jews was that the new city should be built on the plan and model of the old. The Jerusalem they had in their minds was the strong fortress which could resist attack, the guardian of the nation's throne and altar, wherein Israel might dwell secure from the heathen world outside. A restoration of the former glories was the utmost they dared to hope for. That was their ideal reconstruction; but it was not Zechariah's.

The prophet, too, had his visions like the rest, and this is what he saw: a young man with a measuring-line in his hand about to measure the ground-plan of the new Jerusalem. By the prophet's side there stood an angel-interpreter, just as Virgil or Beatrice stood beside Dante in his visions; and when another angel appeared upon the scene, the interpreter bade him run and stop the young man with the measuring-line, and for this reason: the Jerusalem of the future was not to be rebuilt on the same lines as the Jerusalem of the past; no measurements would be needed; for the new city was to be built upon a larger scale, to make room for the large increase of its citizens; it was to lie open like an unwalled town, capable of indefinite expansion; and as for defences, stone walls would not be needed, for Jehovah Himself would be a wall of fire round about, and His glorious presence would dwell within the city.

Here, in this vision of Zechariah, we have presented to us in vivid contrast the rival elements in the faith of Israel—the temper which was always in favour of setting up stone walls and living within them, and the temper which refused to be confined, and looked beyond, and trusted God. These elements run deep in human nature; they need not be rivals, if we can once learn how to be both loyal to the past and open-minded towards the future, and how to maintain the material fabric, the outward institutions, for spiritual ends.

¶ There is an old and familiar story connected with the founding of Constantinople. Legend says that the Emperor Constantine was one night encamped upon the site where now the great Eastern city stands, when in his dreams he received a command from heaven to build a new capital for his empire upon that spot. On the morning of the very next day Constantine addressed himself to the task of marking out the boundaries of the new city. On foot, with a lance in his hand, the Emperor himself led the solemn procession, and directed the line which was traced as the boundary of the destined capital. On and on he went, until the vastness of the outline began to astonish and then to alarm his attendants. At last someone, bolder than the rest, ventured to call the Emperor's attention to the wide circuit he was marking out, and suggested it was time to stop, as the outline already exceeded the most ample measure of a great city. But Constantine was deaf to their pleading, and continued to press on. 'I shall still advance,' was his reply, 'till He—the invisible Guide—who marches before me thinks proper to stop.'

1. Now the lesson of Zechariah's vision lies writ large upon the surface of it, and it is a lesson which is surely pertinent to the life and work of the Church, and especially to the efforts which the Church is making to extend her borders, to lengthen her cords and strengthen her stakes, to carry out her mission in the world. We to-day are engaged in building a city of God; we to-day are seeking to advance the Kingdom of God. We go back in memory to some of the glorious days of the past, and think that it will be as yesterday. We want to model things upon the old ways. But we must see another vision than that. We must try to understand that God's ways are not ours, neither are His thoughts ours. We must not attempt to measure this city of God with our little measuring-lines, but must follow His leading and carry out His plan. We may illustrate this principle from history.

(1) If we go back to the beginnings of the Christian Church we ought easily to be able to realize how different was God's working from human anticipations. Judged by any human standard, the enterprise that the early Christian preachers undertook was a hopeless enterprise indeed. They had against them the embattled forces of the whole world. All the might of the Roman Empire was cast into the other scale, and yet they went everywhere with practically no resources beyond their faith. They had neither wealth nor prestige, nor the support of any section of society, nor the smile of any of those whose smile counted for anything in those days; and, if they had been asked to take a measuring-line and measure their Jerusalem, they would have said it wanted a very small line indeed. They were a few more or less obscure communities scattered in few and obscure places in the outskirts of the Roman Empire, and that was all. Looking back, we know what God's measuring-line was then, that Jerusalem was a city that no wall could contain. There were the beginnings of great things, there were all human anticipations being overthrown and cast to the winds. It was not a question of seclusion; it was a question of faith, and the faith these

men entertained, the faith they preached, the gospel of which they were the depositaries, proved itself to be a thing so big, so potent, so infinite in its capacity, that no human calculations would suffice to show its meaning or to measure its power.

(2) And we may go back over our own history to the days when modern missionary work began, to the time of the Evangelical Revival. What was it that led to that great and unexpected outburst in the Church ? The Church at that time had her measuring-lines, and they were very narrow. The current theology was a hard, dogmatic, intensely narrow thing ; the philanthropy of the time was the same. It had to be strictly squared with the human interests of the moment, with slavery abroad, and with slavery at home. And we remember how John Wesley came and took the world for his parish, and began to preach not only a wider gospel, but a wider faith, and showed men that slaves had souls. We remember what that wider vision meant to men, how it brought into the souls of men a new and larger hope, how it made preaching a reality.

The new evangelism meant a new philanthropy. The slave was freed, and the factory hand was at any rate reckoned to be a human being, the children in the mines were brought up to the open air, and the Church herself, like some great ship that has a sudden shock, shivered, and she has been shivering since. She has not understood the bearing of it all, yet the Church herself had a vision of a gospel to be preached to the whole world, and men began timidly and tentatively to go out to black people, and they are still timidly and tentatively dealing with them. They have not yet got to the point of regarding them really as brothers on exactly the same level as ourselves in the sight of God. The measuring-line is not long enough yet ; but we have the vision, and Jerusalem from that day began to be planned on rather a nobler scale, and men began to discover that the old measuring-lines were a little too short.

2. We have seen Zechariah's vision again and again in history, and the question is, Are we prepared to act upon the vision we have seen ? We are still too apt to cling to the old standards, still too apt to judge of the work of the Church by human capacities, by the instruments we have in our hands, rather than by the will of God and by the design and intention that God has, and that He would have us fulfil.

(1) To begin with, do we not take far too narrow views of Christianity itself ? Have we yet discovered as we ought to have done that God's work and God's intentions are not to be measured even by our Christian theologies ; that as the vision grows upon us the walls of our intellectual city have to be thrust forward, and that the time may possibly come when that city will be a city without walls ? It is perfectly certain that the work of God for the future, man's knowledge of God in the coming days, is not to be always dictated and measured by the discoveries and theories and activities of the past. We need to be ready to open our eyes, and to behold the new city of God.

(2) Our view of Christianity as we preach it to the outside world is often too narrow. No one who has really studied missionary work will need to be told how much harm has been done on the foreign field by the tendency there is to take Christianity to outside nations as a European religion. Christianity is more than a European religion—infinitely more. We do not need to be told, either, how much harm is being done to-day by the sectarian way in which we preach our Christianity, every one going out in the interests of a particular sect, and assuming that this sect has a portion of the truth, or an aspect of the truth, that none other has, and that this is the best, the only, way in which God's truth can be presented. We may thank God that on the mission field to-day the force of circumstances is making this less and less possible ; we are being driven to see that behind all the sects is a common Christianity, and a Christ who is greater than any of them.

¶ At the recent Jerusalem Conference we found certain questions becoming acute. We could feel the tingle of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy in the air as we neared Jerusalem. We could also feel the coming clash between the German and the American outlooks on the Kingdom of God—one said that it was a supernatural gift from above, the other that it was a task. When the Conference was nearing its close we found that we hadn't settled the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy—we had simply transcended it. We saw that there was something bigger than each—the gospel. In our quest to live and give that gospel, our questions seemed to solve themselves. Christ held us both![1]

(3) We are far too apt to preach to outsiders our religion as an intellectual thing. Do we not far too often tend to insist upon certain credal definitions, or certain dogmatic formulæ, as though these were of themselves essential to the faith? Do we not forget that in the early days the gospel of Christ was not a form of words, not a creed, still less a theology, but was a life, and was interpreted and spoken of continually in terms of life and of power? It was a dynamic, and what we want, surely, in dealing with the great heathen nations and religions of to-day is a gospel that is not one theory concerning God and the universe that is to be set up over against others, which they will always consider as good as ours, but a new force, something that can enter into human life and dwell with men, and make men; that will form and fashion what we call a civilization, and turn things upside down as in the early days. We want more elasticity in our Christianity. We want to be able to put it to these people as something that touches the heart, and life, and prospects, and eternal destinies of every man and woman and child.

(4) We take too narrow views, also, not of the message which we have to give to men, but of the men to whom we have to give it. There is no religion in the world that takes a view of humanity so high as the Christian faith, and yet we may doubt whether Christian countries, as a whole, have ever yet attained to the measure of the fullness of the estimate of humanity which was entertained by our Lord. He went about on the assumption that the publican and the harlot and the Samaritan—the pariahs of His time—were His brethren, His Father's children, and equally deserving of His care with the High Priest and the Pharisee and the Rabbi. Now that, of course, was absolutely revolutionary, far more so than we are willing to recognize. And it was something of that spirit that got hold of our fathers in the days of the Revival, and sent them out with a great pity for men, with a burning desire to save them, because they had a burning belief that men all have souls. We have not yet risen to the height of that vision; things will be very different when we have. Now many a so-called Christian Englishman goes to India or South Africa, and to him the black people that he meets are simply 'niggers,' and often niggers with an unpleasant epithet. And how difficult it is for those at home to recognize that the stoker in the bowels of the steamer, or the filthy vagabond who brushes by us in the street, is a man and a brother, for whom Christ died. Yet that is the basis of our Christian evangelism. Unless we can go out to these people and tell them that they are all the children of God, that all have within them this Divine capacity, we have no message left at all.

¶ James Aggrey of Achimota, who was educated in America, was a highly cultured, courteous gentleman, a Greek and Latin scholar, witty in conversation, and a charming companion. Nevertheless, when travelling to America on a crowded British ship, he was given a cabin to himself and a table to himself, because some of the passengers thought it intolerable to associate with a black man. When asked by an acquaintance what he felt about it, he replied, 'Well, the joke is on my side. You are packed like sardines in a tin: I have a cabin to myself, a table to myself, a whole steward to myself!'[1]

'Oh, East is East and West is West,
And never the twain shall meet.'
So spake a son of man—and erred!

Oh, man is man, and man with man shall meet,
So taught the Son of Man, and at His feet,
Bade us there learn the worth of *human* worth;
To see the man apart from race and birth.

To find in Aryan pale and Aryan brown,
In Mongol and in sun-blacked African,
The oneness of humanity—the same
God-touched, aspiring, worthful soul of man.[2]

(5) Again, do we not make a mistake in measuring our Christian gospel alongside of the faiths of the pagan world? We hear much in these days about the science of Comparative Religion, and it is a most excellent thing. It is necessary that we should know what the religions of India and China are and mean; we should understand the dark faiths of Animism and Fetishism, and be able to realize what passes for religion among the peoples of the

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[1] E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of Every Road*, 128.

[1] E. S. Woods, *A Faith that Works*, 133.

[2] E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road*, 149.

Dark Continent and of the Southern Seas. But have we not assumed too readily that our religion may be measured by the same standards that are applied to these? Have we not assumed too readily that Christianity is just one among the many religions of the earth, a better one, no doubt, one that suits us better, but that there is a great deal to be said for leaving these ancient and wonderful peoples in the contented possession of their ancestral faiths, which are so suited to them, and in which they are so rooted? In entertaining for a single moment such ideas—ideas which are not, perhaps, widely held in the Christian Church, but are certainly widely held outside it and by its critics—we are false, not only to the Christian religion, but also to the conception of humanity which the Christian religion enforces.

A man may learn something about the history of the Indian and the Chinese religions by consulting the books, but to know what they are he must go and live among the people and realize how to them life is one long, haunting fear. We ought to believe more in Christianity, as a real civilizing and uplifting agency. We are not aware always of the real sense of need there is among these peoples.

¶ There is a story concerning one who, after talking to some Chinese coolies, and trying to show them what Christ meant to them, woke up one night to hear them around the fire crooning a song they had made up in their own tongue:

We cannot find the door,
  The door to rest of heart,
To joys that will endure,
  To hope that shall be sure
When earthly sense depart;
  We cannot find the door.

The Church must get back its faith that God is far more concerned with the evangelization of the world than we are, and that in His time He will do it. It does not depend upon the tools we have to use; our success does not depend upon our administration or organization. It is well to have those—as perfect as you like—but not to depend upon them too much. We are far too apt to complain of our swords, and to measure things by the length of them. It is the man behind the sword that matters, and even the man without a sword, if he has in him the strength of the everlasting Father, will go, as Livingstone went, without a supporter, without money, and will do his work; and the Church that has that faith, that believes in God, and is prepared to do His will, that believes, not in the intellectual and credal fashion of to-day, but with a practical faith, the faith that does things and works—the Church that so believes will, in spite of all drawbacks and difficulties, keep high the banner of the Cross, and carry out the building of a Jerusalem that shall be as limitless as that of the prophet's vision of old.

The Man with the Measuring-Line

Zech. ii. 2.—'Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem.'

This young man's mistake lay in thinking it was possible to set the real greatness of the Holy City down in yards and feet. The angel had to tell him that his tape-line was missing, and was bound to miss, the most important factors in the situation. There was that about the Holy City which no rod could measure. For God was there.

1. This is an age that believes greatly in the measuring-line. We weigh, we test, we measure everything, and what we cannot weigh and test and measure, we refuse to believe in. We are reducing the world to the world that we can touch and see and hear. Men are excluding the eternal, the invisible, the supernatural. Poets and prophets and psalmists found the earth full of wonder and of glory, and of beautiful and sacred mystery. They looked at the stars, and the stars declared the glory of God. They looked at the sea, and the sea to them lay in the hollow of God's hand. They looked at the earth, and they found the earth crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God.

There was a time when meadow, grove, and
    stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
    To me did seem
    Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.

The very commonest things were windows through which men gazed with awestruck eyes into the infinite and the eternal.

But all that, some say, is mere fancy and illusion. The crucible and the microscope and the balance unveil the whole secret of the earth. Scientific materialism is simply the cult of the measuring-line. But when a man proceeds with his little scientific measuring-line to measure this earth, to tell what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof, he is trying the impossible, he is seeking to measure the immeasurable. The meaning of this world will never be revealed by means of crucibles and lenses and balances. The botanist can tell us all about the structure of the daisy. He can tell us to what species and genus it belongs. He can talk learnedly about calyx, and pistil, and stamen, and all the rest. But having said that, do we know all about the daisy?

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but *if* I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

The secret of *life* has baffled science from the creation even until now. So the simplest things in Nature cover up unfathomable mysteries. Everywhere the seen leads out into the unseen, and the finite into the infinite. The world of matter opens out into the vast and infinite world of spirit. No measuring-line can compass it, for it is ever the case that there is—

A deep below the deep, and a height beyond
the height;
Our hearing is not hearing, and our seeing is not
sight.

¶ Some years ago, when Mr Balfour was opening new buildings of the National Physical Laboratory at Teddington, he began by reminding the students how largely science depends on measurement. He extolled, as he well might, the patience and accuracy of scientific research, and freely acknowledged the world's great debt to it. And then he went on to remind that scientific audience that there is much more in life than can be treated in that way, that, in fact, the dearest and most precious things in it simply cannot be measured at all![1]

2. This world, life, growth, law, man, Christ—anything, indeed, that has the touch of Almighty God in it—cannot be measured by the lines and figures of man. There is always something unmeasured and unmeasurable that escapes the most perfect statistics.

(1) Take *man* himself! How are we going to measure a man? We may measure him materially—by the chemical composition of his body, by his capacity of brain, by the size of his stature, or by the amount of money he makes. But does all this sum up man and what is in man? We cannot measure manhood and human personality in this way.

¶ I remember once, when I was in Stratford-on-Avon, seeing a very remarkable sight. It was a man in the street, outside the house of Shakespeare, busy with his theodolite. And even then, though I was not religious then, and not much given to finding Bible parallels, I remember how I was tempted to accost him, and ask him if he was measuring Jerusalem. So many cubic feet in Shakespeare's house—so many palaces of Elsinore! So many toiling domestics in the kitchen—so many Ariels and Calibans! And all the villainy of Iago in it, and all the love of Romeo and Juliet, and all the sighing of melancholy Jacques in the forest that is everywhere and nowhere.[2]

It was just this material measurement of man that nearly wrecked faith centuries ago. When people discovered that the earth moved round the sun, instead of the sun moving round the earth, they began to say to themselves: 'What is man, and what is this world of ours, a mere pigmy star amid the multitudes of the heavenly host? How can God care for a little earth like this, how can God care for us amid all the immensities of space?'

They only recovered their faith when they went back to the values of Jesus and realized that man's value depends upon his spiritual quality. A man is what he is to God and to Jesus Christ. A man is what he is as a child of God. A man is what he is in his capacity for freedom, and for love, and for doing God's will. So long as we look upon man by external standards and judge him by his money, or his capacity for making money, or for doing things, we are all wrong. So long as we regard man as a mere instrument and tool in production, we are all wrong.

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[1] A. Alexander, *By Sun and Candle-Light*, 30.
[2] G. H. Morrison, *The Wind on the Heath*, 102.

One of the first things that Jesus did was to fling this new valuation of human personality into the midst of the Scribes and Pharisees, and to say to them, 'How much is a man better than a sheep?' We have got to measure spiritual things by spiritual standards.

(2) Again, take the measurement of a *nation*. How do we measure the importance of a nation, or the greatness of a nation? Do we not measure it by its trade and its exports and imports? Do we not measure it by the number of its population or by the size of its colonies? Do we not often measure it by its army and navy? Is not that the standard that we apply to nations, and is it not that which is often wrong with us, that we are trying to measure spiritual things by material standards?

What is the quality of a nation? A nation's strength consists of the quality of its manhood and womanhood. It does not matter how big it is. A nation is measured not by the number of its colonies, or the size of its empire, but by the way in which it deals with other nations; by the way in which it trains them in freedom and independence, so that when they reach independence they shall be allies and friends, and not enemies; by what it does in the progress of the world, and by the place it takes in the community of nations; by what it does to serve God and God's purpose for His world.

(3) Again, take the *Church*! 'What is the power of the Church?' men ask; and then they turn up books and registers, and read off figures giving the strength of all the various churches under the Christian name—members, finance, agencies—calling them out like so many head of sheep. And then, they say—'That is what the Christian Church stands for in modern life.'

But that is *not* what the Christian Church stands for, though one had every possible statistic that ingenuity could devise. A few million Christians, is it? Is that all? No, it is a few million Christians, plus the Holy Ghost: it is the temporal Church on earth, plus the eternal spirit of Jesus. It is this unmeasured and unmeasurable element that has given the visible Church of Christ a power in the world out of all possible proportion to its size and numbers, that has given it an influence which has moulded modern civilization, that has enabled it to reconstruct even our moral values, and still enables it to permeate like a leaven the whole thought and hope and future of the world. The Church of Christ is not so many members or so many institutions, but it is the eternal power of God, radiating out through redeemed men and women in unimaginable ways and in immeasurable quantity, to the uttermost parts of the world.

¶ Three hundred years ago a little ship crossed the Atlantic, the *Mayflower*. People would not venture to cross the Atlantic in such a tub to-day. You could have swung it up on the after-deck of one of the latest Cunard steamers without having appreciably added to the freight. That little ship carried in its hold a company of men and women who had left home and fatherland for Jesus' name, carried moral forces enough to lay the foundation of the mightiest republic the world has ever seen. Nobody could measure that; it was God's building.

¶ When Dr Laws, the great Scottish missionary of Livingstonia, first went out he was, in the eyes of Scotland, a dead failure. He settled down there to work, and then heathenism began to roll across his path with its slave raids. His work was flooded out, and he had to leave it for a while, and go and begin at another station. One paper actually summed up the result of Dr Laws' first mission thus: 'Liabilities: five years' hardship and toil; five years' cost, £5000; five European graves. Assets: one convert and one abandoned mission station.' That is the application of the measuring-line to foreign missions, and to the Kingdom of God. And yet, when you go into the history of that effort of Dr Laws, you discover that without his first attempt to enter that country there would be no mission station there to-day, probably, and a large part of Africa would never have been opened up to civilizing influences as it has been.[1]

(4) When we narrow the survey further, and come to *ourselves*, taking stock of our own doings and service and manner of life, we also should do well to remember Zechariah's angel. We can never calculate the influence of even a single kind act, or one upright Christian life. Because we cannot measure God. For all that

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[1] J. Reid, in *Record of Christian Work*, Aug. 1926.

it looks so insignificant, every bit of true Christian service, every loving, self-forgetful act, is another stone in the building of God's city here on earth, and it is of that city, the prophet reminds us, that all man's estimates come hopelessly short. Let us be content with that. Let us say simply of the work we are trying to do for the love of God—'It is bigger far than it looks, it is much more important than I know.' That, at least, will be a safe truth. For the last word about God's kingdom or His city is just this—that neither we nor any other can ever measure it.

A Brand plucked from the Fire

Zech. iii. 2.—'And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?'

1. Church and State were represented in two men who were the leaders of the company of Jews who returned from Babylon. Joshua was their ecclesiastical and Zerubbabel was their political leader. It is to Joshua, the High Priest, that the words of the text refer. In his vision the prophet saw Joshua standing before the angel of the Lord as an accused person might stand before his judge; and at the right hand of Joshua stood Satan, ready to accuse him. To stand at the right hand of any man on such an occasion was to occupy the position of one who intended either actively to help or actively to oppose, to stand by a man as his advocate or to come forward as his accuser. When Satan stands at the right hand of anyone, it is of course as an adversary; and it is therefore to resist and accuse Joshua in his exercise of the office of High Priest that he stands at his right hand before the angel of the Lord. Satan appears here in the character assigned to him elsewhere in the Bible—the accuser of the brethren. In the Book of Job he is represented as accusing Job to God and depreciating his piety. On that occasion he was permitted to state his accusation, but when he appeared as the accuser of Joshua in the vision which Zechariah saw, he was silenced before he could speak.

The special object of this vision appears to have been to restore the confidence of the people in the priesthood. The captivity showed God's displeasure with His people; and it was notorious that the priests were as bad as the people. Haggai had charged the Jews to rebuild the Temple, but of what use would the Temple be unless they who ministered in it were restored to favour, and the worship which they offered were acceptable to God? In the vision which the prophet saw, Joshua stood before the angel of the Lord in his official character, yet he was not clothed with the rich apparel of the High Priest. The vision of Joshua standing before the angel of the Lord in his filthy garments, with Satan standing at his right hand to resist him in the execution of his office and to accuse him of iniquity, was therefore a representation in picture of what the people with an awakened conscience were at this time feeling and fearing. But at the command of the angel of the Lord who rebuked Satan Joshua's filthy garments were taken away from him, and he was clothed with rich apparel; and a mitre was set upon his head. The accuser was silenced, the iniquity was taken away, the honour of the priest's office was restored.

Joshua was acquitted, not because the priests were free from guilt, not because Satan's accusation was false, but because God had not cast off His people, because He loved them and the man who stood in His presence as their representative. In the fire of the captivity God had shown how He regarded sin. Both priest and people had suffered; they were charred by that fire. But He rescued them because He had purposes of mercy towards them. The filthy garments of Joshua, the defilements of flesh and spirit which they signified, made him and the priesthood which he represented displeasing to Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. But instead of listening to the malicious accuser who stood prepared with his undeniable evidence of guilt, instead of disowning the sin-stained priesthood in the person of Joshua, God acted upon that plan in which mercy and truth have met together. He took away their uncleanness, and received them again into favour.

¶ It has been suggested that we have here the original of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. I hardly think that was so, because though our Lord's acquaintance with the Old Testament was greater than that of most of us, I do not think He needed any special inspiration or prompting in His employment of picture or parable to teach spiritual truth; still the resemblance is striking. Our text is almost an equivalent of 'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' I do not, however, think that Zechariah had this far-reaching evangelical significance of the truth in his mind when he uttered it. He did not see the universal application of the truth as it was made by Jesus.[1]

2. 'Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?' Probably there are no words in the prophecy of Zechariah with which we are so familiar as we are with these. Many penitent men and women, rescued by almighty power from persistence in evil courses, have felt them to be a true description of themselves after they had come to a better mind.

¶ It was Dr Whyte's lifelong aim to be a preacher of righteousness, and, since he would not heal the wound of his people slightly, a preacher, first, of sin. The school of religious thought in which he was brought up, with its emphasis on strict self-examination, and perhaps also the entail of suffering in his early home, had given a sharper edge to a naturally sensitive conscience. This characteristic appears in the following recollection spoken in his fiftieth year: 'The first text I ever heard a sermon from was that great text in Zechariah, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" "It is I, Lord," my young heart answered; and my heart is making the same answer here to-day.'[2]

There are many who in looking back upon their past experience can see that they have had a narrow escape from dangers which have ruined others, and might as easily have ruined them. Others have stooped to degrading companionships, and have formed habits which have been their destruction; but they themselves, although there may have been a time when they also were in danger of forming such habits, have been arrested by the providence of God, and have been saved from disgrace, from a wasted life, from unhappiness, from ruin. The impulsive folly of a day, the reckless passion of an hour, has brought calamity upon others, but they themselves, impulsive and reckless too, have been kept from doing themselves harm, and have had to pay no such penalty. It seems to them in looking back upon the past as if in their own case things had not been allowed to proceed to their natural consequences. They were like the bird which hastens to the snare, and knows not that it is for his life; but the snare was in some way broken, and they were delivered. Or they were like the foolish moth which persists in its desire to make trial of the attractive and destructive flame. And they would have destroyed themselves if a wisdom greater than their own had not interposed, and removed them from the fatal fascination.

Chosen not for good in me,
Wakened up from wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Saviour's side,
By the Spirit sanctified,
  Teach me, Lord, on earth to show,
  By my love, how much I owe.[1]

3. Most thankful should those be who have thus been rescued, even though they have not passed through the fire unscathed. They cannot expect to be as they might have been if they had not wilfully walked in self-chosen ways. No one can pass through such experiences as they have passed through without suffering loss. They have weaknesses of character which they have brought upon themselves. From time to time there are memories of the past to shame them, and polluting imaginations to distress them. There are, it may be, positions in life which they cannot fill and joys of life to which they must be strangers. They live, in fact, a sort of maimed existence; and this punishment, if no other, they must bear.

¶ We recall John B. Gough's bitter cry: 'The scars remain!' he lamented, 'scars never to be eradicated, never to be removed in this life. I have been plucked like a brand from the burning; but the scar of the fire is on me!'

They who escape from a burning house may be seriously hurt before they are placed in safety. They may be weakened for life in comparison with their former strength, but, when they think of the danger from which they escaped, their predominant feeling is one of thankfulness that they escaped at all. The brand plucked out of the fire is blackened here and there, and in places it crumbles at the touch, but it *has* been plucked out; and though it has suffered injury, it is not consumed.

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[1] R. J. Campbell.

[2] G. F. Barbour, *The Life of Alexander Whyte*, 305.

[1] R. M. M'Cheyne.

4. Their escape from danger ought to make those who are as a brand plucked out of the fire not only thankful but hopeful. For why is it that anything is plucked out of the fire? Is it not because it is thought to possess some value? Otherwise, no one would take the trouble to pluck it out. If you put a letter into the fire by mistake instead of some circular which does not interest you, and immediately endeavour to snatch it out, it is because the letter has a value or a usefulness to you which the circular has not. And every time that you look at it its blackened look and burned edges testify, not only to its narrow escape from destruction, but also to its value. So when, by the action of His providence God arrests in their career persons who have begun to walk in some evil way, when He arouses the torpid conscience, and constrains them to alteration of feeling and of life, they ought, as they look back upon His dealings with them, to feel not only thankful but hopeful. For why is it that He has dealt thus with them? He has rescued them because He values them, and because He knows that they have in them a power of doing Him service, because He designs to use them in some way for His glory. They may be charred by the fire in which they have been, they may be disqualified for this sphere of usefulness or for that, but they must have been rescued by God in order that they may serve Him truly in *some* way. They ought to believe that He will provide them with sufficient opportunities of usefulness, and to look forward hopefully to the future.

¶ In the familiar lines of Hezekiah Butterworth there are two significant *buts*, and we are in danger of noticing only the one:

But the bird with the broken pinion
Never soared so high again.

This is the first. That is the truth that Huxley saw. But it is not the whole truth. There is another *but*:

But the bird with the broken pinion
Kept another from the snare,
And the life that sin had stricken
Raised another from despair.
Each loss has its compensations,
There is healing for every pain;
Though the bird with the broken pinion
Never soars so high again.[1]

Awakening

Zech. iv. 1.—'And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep.'

The man who wrote these words was a preacher, whose business it was to see and to help his fellows to see; and yet he confesses that in the central matters he had not seen as he should. He knew the Temple and its solemnities; he knew what the priests did there and the people; and, if one had questioned him, he might have said that God's presence there was indispensable. He knew, but he did not think; and here he makes confession that, had it not been for the merciful provocation of God, he never would have known these things as they deserve. Zechariah was not a stranger to the higher reaches of apprehension; in the past months he had gone from vision to vision, and the experience might have quickened all his faculty. But custom flattens everything, and the very sense of knowing these things so well had dulled his curiosity. 'My better sense was asleep, and it needed a messenger of God to awaken me to a sight of what I thought I understood; but now, by God's mere grace, it looks to me strange and miraculous and new.'

Such a confession, so artlessly made, is full of admonition. We may have behind us a record of insight and of days of lifted mood; but it is never safe to reckon that yesterday's gift is with us still, untouched by the corrosions of the years. There are words which, at one time, brought up before our sense the living majesty of God; and though we still consent to them it is with little quickening of pulse. We may profess that they are great, but certainly they are not great to us as once they were; and that may mark a grievous falling off. In his Ephesian Letter Paul traces back the debasement of pagan morals to the fact that men had ceased to feel; they were no longer shocked by what ought to have shocked them, and thus they were free to wander always farther away from virtue. And much of the stagnation within the Church, of the lack of willing effort, of the lack of confident expectation and gladness, is traceable to the same source—that Christian folk have so much ceased to feel. The love of Christ has become for them a commonplace of preaching; the continual presence of Jesus in the world is not to them a cause of wonder now.

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[1] F. W. Boreham, *The Luggage of Life*, 68.

¶ Speaking of the love of God, Rainy said: 'We preach it, and believe it in a way, but we no longer wonder at it in our hearts.' When Peter saw Christ's glory he cried out, 'Depart from me,' and even the Baptist shrank back, almost coweringly. 'I am not worthy to unloose his shoes,' he said. But you and I take all Christ is, and all Christ does, and all Christ offers, as the merest thing of course. As Keats says of science, peering and poking and, to him, spoiling, by an unwise pushing into the mysteries of things:

There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.

And Christ's Cross, too, is there far down 'in the dull catalogue of common things.' When the boys first went to the Front they were much struck by the Calvaries at the cross-roads; but by and by they grew accustomed to them, never noticed them, went whistling past upon their careless way. And we, too, take our Lord for granted now, are not surprised by anything He does or says or is.[1]

1. This world in which we live is to many of us altogether familiar and trivial; but if our senses were awake, says the prophet, we should see it to be in great part unexplored. Those of us who live in a place of romantic beauty must often be reminded of this. We know that our city is extolled, and in a tepid way we do ourselves admire it; but most days we go about the streets with scarcely a thought of the scenes which men cross oceans to look upon. But now and then, when some shift of light falls in with a favouring mood, it seems as if a curtain were lifted, and we marvel at our accustomed dullness. It is in this that poets help their fellows, lending their eyes out, so that plain men, instead of the dismal prospects of every day, gain through them a sense of the vital quality of things. That is what all prophets do. Elisha and his servant were trapped one night in the little town of Dothan; and in the morning the lad was struck with panic when he saw the marauding troops shutting the city in. But the prophet asked that the lad's eyes should be opened, and then he saw that 'the mountain round about was full of horses and chariots of fire.' He saw the former things, for they were real, but he saw greater things as well. For it is a rich world we live in, with far more within it than meets the outward eye.

Everywhere, under the crust of this bewildering life, there is another level of power and wonder, at which a mass of people never guess. One of the lately discovered Sayings of Jesus gives memorable utterance to this: 'Wherever they may be, they are not without God; yea, if there be one alone, I am with him. Raise the stone and there thou shalt find me; cleave the wood and there am I.' That is to say, though a man be set down in a secular world, with no help of priest or fellowship to sustain him, yet if he turn to worship, rearing the altar and preparing the sacrifice, he will not miss the help of Christ. And the Saying has wider applications: a mason at his work might find a promise in it, or a woman breaking sticks for the morning fire. 'Raise the stone, and there thou shalt find me; cleave the wood and there am I.' This discovery of Jesus Christ as everywhere present is the supreme achievement of the awakened sense.

I cannot put His Presence by, I meet Him everywhere;
I meet Him in the country town, the busy market-square;
The mansion and the tenement attest His Presence there.

Upon the funnelled ships at sea He sets His shining feet;
The distant ends of empire not in vain His Name repeat—
And, like the presence of a rose, He makes the whole world sweet!

When this Divine gift of awakening is granted to a man it changes his whole outlook, and brings impossible things within his reach. In telling of the Transfiguration, Luke notes one fact which the other Evangelists omit, that Peter and his companions 'were heavy with sleep,' and he adds, 'but when they were fully awake (R.V.) they saw Christ's glory.' There is much virtue in that adverb, and it may be questioned if, in the Evangelist's sense, some of us have ever yet been fully awake. Up that hill there had toiled four working men, who, in the face of the wealth and learning and tradition of their race, had dreamed of a new beginning in religion. It seemed a hopeless venture, for the oppositions and the prejudices were not imaginary. But when they were fully awake, and knew the resources of this astonishing world in which God is continually revealed, they saw the oppositions as before, but they also saw their Master radiant and exalted; they saw the great figures of their history coming like courtiers to do Him homage, coming and withdrawing, whilst He was left supreme and alone. The balance of forces was radically altered then, as it will be for every one who is fully awake. For Jesus Christ, whose very name is health and purity and renovation, is secretly present in this much disparaged earth; and until we have come to see Him there, we are missing what is greatest, and indeed we can scarcely be said to see the world at all.

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[1] A. J. Gossip, *The Hero in thy Soul*, 26.

2. But if this awakening of sense is so desirable, the question grows urgent of how to attain to it. With a fine vagueness the prophet reports that 'the angel came and waked him,' but he nowhere tells what the angel was like; and if he had told, the description would have helped us little, since God's messengers to men are not always of one shape or fashion. Sometimes the angel is altogether anonymous, a passing stranger, or a chance word which finds an undreamed-of context in the conditions of him who overhears it.

¶ It is told of Gerard Groot, a Dutch Reformer of the fourteenth century, that in the city of Cologne he was watching some public games when a stranger slipped up beside him and said, 'Why standest thou thus intent upon such empty things? Thou oughtest to become another man.' Then he was lost in the crowd, and no one cared to ask who he was; but, like the prophet's angel, he had waked a man; and up and down the Rhineland, from Basel to Rotterdam, the effect of his word was seen in the lives of many transformed by Gerard's preaching.

And there is the awakening ministry of pain. 'Pain,' says Anatole France, 'is the grand educator of men. Pain taught them the arts, and poetry and morals. Pain inspired them with heroism and with pity. Pain gave life a new value in allowing it to be offered as a sacrifice; and pain, this august and gracious thing, has brought something of the infinite into human love.' 'Before I was afflicted I went astray,' says a Hebrew poet, 'but now I keep thy word,' and many of ourselves would confess that we could never have known how much there is in life if our discernment had not been quickened by this fierce surgery.

I thought that way the fairest I could go,
So strewn with beauties, like a mica road
When the white moonlight all its glitter showed.
I saw fame sparkling, and its radiant show,
When on a sudden from the dark below
Disease came hopping like an ugly toad
And barred my path. So with a heavy load
I turned about with dragging footstep slow.

The path I went was dark, and Pain was there,
But in the gloom I found Some One was near!
Should I have found Him on the other way?
Amid the glitter and success so fair;
Should I have found that love supremely dear?
Lo, the dark road is lit by sunlight gay!

It is when the Spirit of the Lord rests upon a man that he becomes quick of understanding, so that he no longer judges after the sight of his eyes. This, surely, is what we most require; and in this we are not left to uncertainty, for nothing is plainer in the New Testament than that the gift of the Spirit may be had for the asking. Jesus lays down the one condition on this point with a simplicity which is almost startling. 'If with all your faults you are able to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit *to them that ask Him*?' The words do not suggest any labour in seeking, for indeed the Spirit is about us like the atmosphere, and all that is needed is that we should open the windows of our heart and let Him in. If He came to our intellect, He would make us less prejudiced, more truth loving, less hampered by timidity and conceit. If He came to our character, He would free us from self-love and would so enrich us with all gentleness and all courage that men would take knowledge of us that we had been with Him.

Our Lord accosts us as He did a blind man long ago, saying: 'What will ye that I should do unto you?' So let our answer be prompt: 'Lord, that I may receive my sight!' For then we should see life not on the outside merely, but in its hidden fullness and wonder; and most of all, we should constantly discern Himself as He travels on His secret way about the world for which He died. And that sight changes everything.

The Supremacy of the Spiritual

Zech. iv. 6.—'Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.'

ZECHARIAH'S wonderful visions are full of the spirit of encouragement. In this vision of the Temple Lamp and the two olive-trees there are cheer and strength for Zerubbabel, the governor of Jerusalem, in the assurance that in spite of innumerable difficulties he will see the building of the Temple completed. Before him 'the great mountain shall become a plain,' because he shall not work by his own strength but by the spirit of Jehovah.

The vision, suggested no doubt by the candlestick of the Tabernacle, was of a seven-branched lamp of gold, with lamps on the tops of the branches. Its seven lights were fed by seven pipes from a bowl of oil which stood higher than themselves, and this was fed from two olive-trees which stood to the right and left of it. This sacred lamp has certain unusual features. For one thing the bowl is not placed beneath the lamp, but is fixed at the top of it; and for another thing, and this more remarkable, it is a self-filling lamp. The old lamp had been filled night and morning by the priests, for it was a light that never went out; but in this lamp such a service is no longer needed. It has its reservoir above it, and that reservoir is inexhaustible because it is in touch with Nature herself. These olive-trees have the wonderful property of distilling their oil right into the oil-vessel by two golden pipes. It is this inexhaustible fertility of Nature that becomes a parable of grace. When the prophet asked the meaning of the vision the reply he received was, 'This is the word of the Lord, not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.'

¶ There is a parallel to this vision in English religious literature. 'I saw,' says Bunyan in the account of the Pilgrim's visit to the Interpreter's House, 'that the Interpreter took Christian by the hand, and led him into a place where was a fire burning against a wall, and one standing by it, always casting much water upon it, to quench it; yet did the fire burn higher and hotter. Then said Christian, What means this? The Interpreter answered, This fire is the work of grace that is wrought in the heart; he that casts water upon it, to extinguish and put it out, is the devil; but, in that thou seest the fire, notwithstanding, burn higher and hotter, thou shalt also see the reason of that. So he had him about to the back side of the wall, where he saw a man with a vessel of oil in his hand, of the which he did also continually cast (but secretly) into the fire. Then said Christian, What means this? The Interpreter answered, This is Christ, who continually, with the oil of His grace, maintains the work already begun in the heart; by the means of which, notwithstanding what the devil can do, the souls of His people prove gracious still.'

1. 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit.' This promise was intended first to *hearten Zerubbabel in the poorness of his material resources*, but it has not become obsolete with the passing of the years. No truth is more difficult really to grasp as a practical belief than the might of the spiritual over the material. The world is so real, its forces are so powerful; not only the natural forces which we capture and tame and bend to our uses, the power of air and water and gravitation, the power of steam and electricity and explosives, but those other powers, the power of social position, the power of money, the power of combination, the power of custom, even the power of fact. We are so controlled by forces all around us that we are apt to forget that as Christians we walk by faith, not by sight.

In all work for God, the well-known material forces on which men lean are insufficient. God can rally these to His side and employ them in His cause; yet it is not by these that His work is done. The experiment has been tried a hundred times. In periods when His Spirit has been poured out, wealth, numbers and influence have accrued to the Church; and then, in unspiritual periods, she has tried with these resources to do the work without Him. But the result has always been the same: in spite of even a congestion of means she has become weak and useless.

The power of Pentecost is the one thing needful. We are useless without the gift of the Spirit, as the material lamp without the living flame, coming as it must from something which has life and continuance in itself, from the living olive-trees. Apart from Him the most magnificent efforts and material equipment fail; with Him the most feebly endowed is almighty. The disciples of Jesus were but ordinary people. Pentecost made them flaming Apostles.

We are but organs mute till the Master touches the keys,
Verily vessels of earth into which God poureth the wine:
Harps are we, silent harps that have hung on the willow trees,
Dumb till our heartstrings swell and break with a pulse divine.

2. It gave *courage in the face of stupendous difficulties.* ‘Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.’ The opposition seemed insurmountable. The poverty and inertia of the Jews were a drag on the enterprise. Like a huge unscalable, impassable mountain these fronted the dispirited leader. He is reminded that the combined array is not invincible. No coalition can permanently arrest the work of God. When His Spirit is poured out the threatening obstacles are transformed into the *media* of triumphal progress. Spontaneously the words of Christ spring to mind: ‘If ye have faith and—shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done.’ History furnishes innumerable demonstrations of this encouraging truth. Before the operation of the Spirit ranges of ignorance and prejudice and persecution have been levelled and transformed. When Christianity was ready to start on its triumphant career, the mountain in its way was the persecuting rage of Saul of Tarsus, which threatened to annihilate the infant Church; and God not only removed the obstacle, but converted the persecutor into the greatest missionary of the cross the world has ever seen. On a smaller scale, such things are happening every day. ‘With God all things are possible’ in our Christian life and labour. The mightiest combination of evil need not intimidate. All the mountains of difficulty in our personal experience can be conquered. Evil habits can be checked and our strongest temptations subdued. The hope of the Christian Church confronted by seemingly invincible foes must be in the Holy Ghost. Unbelief and scepticism will give way before His pervasive influence. Worldliness and indifference will disappear before simple reliance on the power of God.

The contrast between ‘might and power’ and the ‘Spirit’ suggests not only the agent of conquest, but also the method. Both represent force, one material, the other spiritual. But the one hints at display, noise, rapid movement; the other at secret, silent, slow operation. God was not in the earthquake, the hurricane, or the fire, but in ‘the voice all still and small.’

¶ Dr Nicol Macnicol of Poona, in a survey of the past thirty years in Indian missions, called *Retrospect and Prospect*, writes: ‘There is an old word of a prophet of Israel to which we have to return if we are to give our message in the India of to-day the free course whereby it and its Subject shall be glorified. It is this, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” It is easy to repeat the old oracle, but it is not so easy to apply it to our lives and to accept its guidance for our duty. We have to learn, and to learn continually, that force is no remedy. The only road into the citadel of a personality is the road of reason and persuasion—shall we not call it at the same time “the road of loving hearts”?’[1]

3. It gave the *assurance that the day of small beginnings would be crowned with completion.* The first efforts of the little community were feeble in the extreme. Contemptuous enemies mocked. Lukewarm friends laughingly prophesied that the attempt would come to naught. But they reckoned without the Spirit of God. ‘Who hath despised the day of small things? For they shall rejoice and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel.’ The tiny beginning was to develop and be crowned at last by completion. On the whole it is not safe to sneer

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[1] *The International Review of Missions*, July 1925.

at small beginnings. For a beginning is to be judged not by its size, but by its motive force, its possibilities.

Only a corn of wheat, like a hard little atom of
clay:
Yet maybe—the Bread of a hungering World,
some far-off day.

Only a passing thought, like a feather a-wing on
the breeze:
Yet maybe—a morrow's Giant of Power, by
lands and seas.

Only a dreaming child, like a million baby-
things:
Yet maybe—God's latest Prophet, sent to
Earth's wonderings.[1]

The beginnings of good are always small. They come like the first streaks of dawn. But the sun is behind them, and the flickering rays are a prophecy of the noontide blaze. Men scoffed at William Booth. But his little company has become an army. They who are wise, and realize the Deity behind and within, patiently wait and wonder and rejoice. How true this is in the experience of the individual. A dream, perhaps, or a hymn sung by a child, or an obscure service may be all that can be pointed to, yet in it may be the germ of a changed life. The still, small voice awakening the heart to duty long neglected has commenced a gracious revival regenerating a people. As Mr Lecky testifies, the conversion of John Wesley marked an epoch in English history.

Christianity itself is the supreme illustration. Only three years of despised, unwelcomed teaching! But it is the inspiration and basis of all progress to-day. Calvary the end! Yet that cross sways the present and the future. The residue a handful of despairing followers. But the Spirit made them the saviours of a world.

The development of good is not restricted by the day of small things, only by the power of the Spirit which is almighty. Ripple succeeds ripple as the stone falls into the lake. The margin alone limits the ever-widening motion. Every little good is the cause of another beginning. The shoreless ocean of eternity is the extent of its final influence.

We stride the river daily at its spring,
Nor in our childish thoughtlessness foresee
What myriad vassal streams shall tribute bring,
How like an equal it shall greet the sea.

O small beginnings, ye are great and strong,
Based on a faithful heart and weariless brain!
Ye build the future fair, ye conquer wrong,
Ye earn the crown, and wear it not in vain.

The Flying Roll and the Flying Angel

Zech. v. 1.—'Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold, a flying roll.'

Rev. xiv. 6.—'And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven.'

THERE is no far-fetched straining needed to bring these two sentences together. Though they lie apart, and in their utterance are divided by the space of many centuries, if we take the one with the other, beneath the glowing imagery in which they are expressed we shall find that they embrace in a striking unity the broad and deep truth of God's revelation as that is brought to bear upon the life and destiny of man. The flying roll: the flying angel: in the one we see the spirit of the Old Testament, in the other the spirit of the New. That is the reign of Nature, this is the reign of grace: there is the law, here is the gospel: there is the justice, here is the mercy of Almighty God.

1. 'Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, a flying roll.' Is this merely the nightmare dream of a Hebrew prophet? Or, is it not rather a vision which carries us irresistibly beyond its immediate purpose to its eternal truth, which holds up before a man in a light terrific by its clearness that law which tells us that behind every soul of man who has sinned there is a dark shadow deepening as the days pass by, which to the prophet's eyes appeared as a flying roll—a roll whose volume grows as it moves on, enclosing within its ever-increasing folds all the records of our past life. Invisible it is at this moment, but when we look at the past we see that which we could not see when it was near. We see that in that fatal moment long ago when we first gave way to temptation, in that moment when we swerved from our fealty to God,

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[1] J. M. B., in *The British Weekly*, 10th Feb. 1927.

there began to be woven a subtle and imperceptible chain, but strong as adamant; a chain which binds all the throbbing present with all the quivering past, a roll whose fibres are the keen vibrations of a sleepless memory, a flying roll which follows all the movements of our being and through all outward changes still is there.

Let us not forget, however, that this is a principle which may work for good as well as for ill. Most assuredly it is no one-sided law. Consider its influence on the positive side. Let a man do good. Let him obey the voice of God. Let him bow his will before the Eternal, and the very stars in their courses will fight for him; and all the bright days he has lived, and all the moral victories he has won, will shed their light upon his path. But let a man do evil. Let him set his will above the Eternal, and by all the force of God's universe he will be pursued and overwhelmed. Success is not to be measured by the standards of the world. The good man alone is successful, the bad man eternally a failure.

Our deeds still travel with us from afar,
And what we have been makes us what we are.

Everything we do or think or say, every form of our activity, has a certain moulding power over the soul, and thus in the lives of most men we find a certain consistency. What would be the condition of human life if it were otherwise, if our state at any one moment were entirely separated from all that had gone before? How heavily weighted man would be in the struggle which his life is! At every fresh encounter he would have to give up the vantage ground so dearly won, and begin the fight anew.

If we search through all the great literatures, the Bibles of the human race, we shall find that the most penetrating and universal thought which has impressed itself upon the mind of man is that ancient doctrine, ever new, of the Nemesis that follows the guilty choice. ' Keeping watch over the universe and letting no offence go unpunished '—that doctrine which has ingrained itself in the common language of men—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, measure for measure—that truth which, whether it comes to us in the imagery of Eastern mythology, or in the burning words of Greek dramatist, or in the quivering accents of ancient prophecy, is the truth which underlay this vision, the flying roll which follows in the track of sin, the presence undefined which cannot be put by.

¶ Dante is not mainly concerned with a supernal world beyond the stars or with a dire region of doom under the earth. He is merely telling us of the inevitable recoil of deeds and choices. Every man is building the house which he is going to inhabit, and is now creating the climate and atmosphere that will inevitably bring him an environment of joy or woe.[1]

¶ George Eliot has taught this lesson more powerfully perhaps than any other writer of modern times. Again and again she shows how a single sin, committed long years ago, not merely bears its appointed fruit, but comes back at last to the author of it laden with these accumulated results, and casts them down at his feet, saying, ' These fruits of sin are yours.' The poor, shivering soul would like to disown them then; but he cannot. They *are all his.* His own iniquities have taken him, and he is holden with the cords of his own sin.[2]

2. Turn now from this dark vision. Let us listen to the voice of the New Testament as it also rings through the ages and finds a joyful echo in the soul of man: ' And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.'

It is the wide sweep of God's free grace that opens up above us like the overhanging firmament of blue. And from the terraces of heaven the angel bearing with him the good news of God is starting on his errands of mercy. Beneath him is spread this little earth on which we dwell and all its teeming myriads of souls—rolling on in the increasing sweep of time, stepping forth into the darkness again. And behold, as the angel flies in the midst of the heaven he bears with him the Everlasting Gospel, the good news of God, the word that came from the inmost heart of the Father, the revealer of the true God. And he calls upon all them that dwell upon the earth, of every nation and kindred and tongue and people, saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.'

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[1] Rufus M. Jones.

[2] J. C. Lambert.

From the lofty watch-tower the angel can see the ravages which sin has made over the souls beneath. And as he bears his message to those souls the power and the grace of God are visible there. For wherever he is heard, wherever a soul in the loneliness of its sin bows itself before the offer of grace, the dark record is erased, and the guilty past effaced, and the flying roll cast off, and the soul which was literally dead in trespasses and sins is reconciled to God and breathes a purer and serener air. That terrible chain which bound the soul to sin and death is snapped by the power of God in Christ.

More than that; even as the power of the flying roll was so subtle and so far-reaching that it threw its baneful influence over every soul of man, even so does the message of the flying angel, the grace of God, come to every soul. As there is no one who can utterly escape the dreadful curse of sin, so need there be no one to whom the grace shall be denied. It is the characteristic of all God's truth that it is two-edged; and the very same law which leads from sin to deeper sin leads also from holiness to higher holiness. Let a man but turn towards the light. Let him freely obey the Infinite Will. Let him look on the Cross. Let him bow before that supreme offering made by Supreme Love because the need of man was great. Looking on that spectacle we see into the very depths of God's heart; we see more, much more, than the terror of God's avenging justice, we see the infinity of His love. When with open face we behold that vision, then goes forth the soul to God. This is something more than an intellectual appreciation of the meaning of Christ's suffering and death. It is, so to speak, to make them spiritually tangible to our own souls. It is to realize that this love is our possession, and, realizing this, the soul goes forth to possess Christ and is emptied of self.

¶ 'I saw also,' says George Fox in his *Journal*, 'that there was an ocean of darkness and death: but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. In that also I saw the infinite love of God.'

Surely there is no man to whom this assurance of a living Saviour should not bring joy. We live in a world of changes. We have a past behind us which is darkened by a record of sin. We have a future before us which is also dark and uncertain. The shadows of time gather fast. Amid the increasing round of daily duties, amid the hard commonplaces of the world's battle, we are hurried on and ever on. There is for us a joy in human friendship, but it is fleeting and fickle at the best. There is a noble pleasure in the sternness of daily toil, but the night cometh when no man can work. What shall be our stay in this shifting scene; who will take us by the hand and lead us through the darkness to the brighter day? There is only one stay on which to rest, and that is true religion; there is only one who can efface the guilty record of the past and give us new life, and that is Jesus Christ.

The Contribution of the Child

Zech. viii. 5.—'And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.'

WHAT a beautiful picture Zechariah gives us of the city of his dreams. 'Jerusalem,' said this far-seeing thinker, 'shall be called a city of truth, and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts the holy mountain. . . . And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.'

. . . On either side the street,
  Which was exceeding fair and wide,
Sweet mansions there mine eyes did meet,
  Green trees the shaded doors did hide.
      My chiefest joys
      Were girls and boys,
That in those streets still up and down did play,
Which crowned the town with constant holiday.

1. What would streets be like without the boys and girls? Take your stand at any street corner, and watch the crowd of men and women as they pass by. The hand of time has been laid upon all their faces, but some he has touched lightly and tenderly, in others he has ploughed deep furrows. Still, everyone has borne and feels the impress of the iron hand, and often where there is least trace on the face the hand has lain heavier on the heart. Time has his symbol and his signature written some-

where, in some way, upon everyone, and we do not like his writing, the characters are too obtrusive and suggestive.

As we watch the crowd of men and women pass by, what a tender sadness is thus given to 'the streets of the city.' There is the merchant, breathless, urgent, having scarcely time to nod, his smiles stamped out by the burden of adversity. There walks a poor widow, indifferent to the surging throng, sadly making her way to the resting-ground where the remains of her loved one is laid. Here comes a man who is trying to get back his yesterdays, while at his heels there timidly steps a man whose all is staked upon to-morrow. There goes Dives, troubled because he has too much wealth; there crouches Lazarus, troubled because he has none. If the streets of the city were to be full of only men and women, they would be a sad and sorrowful spectacle. Care-marks everywhere! Weariness, jadedness, everywhere!

¶ Happy (said I); I was only happy once; that was at Hyères; it came to an end from a variety of reasons, decline of health, change of place, increase of money, age with his stealing steps.[1]

2. What is the element which boys and girls introduce into the bye-ways and thoroughfares of common life? What atmosphere do they introduce into the great high roads of human life? The city is the headquarters of civilization. It is in the city that progressive forces find their point of convergence. We regard the city as the abode of culture, the centre of all higher and far-reaching education. The very word 'urbane,' which refers not so much to quality and depth but rather to a kind of polished breadth, originally meant a man who had acquired all the graces, the smoothness, and the delicate courtesies of city life. Courtesy should make the machinery of individual and social life work more pleasantly and smoothly, and this it will accomplish so long as courtesy is the 'oil of joy,' an exhibition of Christian kindness. But courtesies harden into rules, rules become mere fashions, and are apt to degenerate into a bondage. Jesus Christ respected forms, but His great heart turned the form into a sweet courtesy. The Pharisees regarded forms, but their little hearts turned the courtesy into a bandage. True courtesy comes that we may have life and that we may have it more abundantly. Conventionalism comes to steal and to kill and to destroy; to steal, for it robs us of goodly portions of our heritage; to kill, for it slays the angel of earnest and disinterested service; to destroy, for it turns social life into a mechanism at once loveless and cold. That is how the god of conventionalism, the god of mere fashion is at work to-day. He is cutting and pruning our social life, and our Church life too, into well-trimmed proprieties. In all lives there are certain ruggednesses which must be cut down and refined, but to convert spirit into form, to trim and dress the heart-life until it becomes a mere convention, this will only impoverish the quality and the music of our richly-dowered souls.

Is there any natural antidote to this enfeebling and stiffening tendency? Is there any element in society which saves us from these unnatural affectations, and leads us back to a cheery and bright-eyed simplicity? Yes, there are the boys and girls; we cannot get them into the social bandages! Where they are there will be simplicity, freedom, natural and innocent gaiety. What matters it that social usage says, 'Keep off the grass!' They will not be confined to the hard, gravelled paths of mere propriety, they will be on the grass playing among the daisies and sunbeams! How they startle us out of our reserve! How they entice us into freedom! How they drag society out of its mechanism, and make it alive! What happy influence they have in thawing our cold and wintry formalities! 'A little child shall lead them'—shall lead them from bondage into liberty, from art into nature, from the hard restraints of winter to the warm expansiveness of spring.

Come to me, O ye children!
  And whisper in my ear
What the birds and the winds are singing
  In your sunny atmosphere.

For what are all our contrivings,
  And the wisdom of our books,
When compared with your caresses,
  And the gladness of your looks?[1]

There is another element which the girls and boys bring into our midst. When a man attains to maturity of years, how ample becomes his gathering-ground for sorrows and cares!

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[1] *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson.*

[1] Longfellow.

From the years that are gone there comes a copious stream of care. As for the years that are to come they roll down a perfect flood. 'Business is good to-day!' Yes, but I have grave doubts about to-morrow! We people the unknown with fearful speeches, with hideous shapes, and then somehow we forget that they are self-created fancies and we persuade ourselves that the population is real. Here, then, is the infinitely extensive mood from which men and women gather their cares—the whole of the past, and the whole of the future. How good it is, then, to turn from all this sorrow about the past and all this anxiety about the future to the boys and girls. They have no troublesome past, they have no conscious, care-burdened future, they live in the immediate present, in the all-absorbing *now*. Like men and women, the children stand between two extremities—the eternal past, and the eternal future—but between the two they trust and play. And we wish we were as restful and as trustful as the little ones. That is what God intends that the little children should do for us. It is His purpose that they should allure us from a paralysing lamentation for a dark and wasted past. It is His loving will that they should make us trustful whenever we stand by a great unknown. Here is a father, busy all day speculating and planning about the coming days. He is looking into the future, sadly wondering what the far-off day may bring. He plans and gazes, gazes and plans until his head throbs, and his heart faints. At the close of day he goes home. The door opens. Here come the little ones, playing, singing, shouting! Playing with the unknown! It is God's message trying to cheer him into restfulness. It is God, using the children to deepen his trustfulness and lessen his care.

¶ On coming to Brechin, I was led, through my youngest boy's behaviour, to see what a blessed thing it is to receive the kingdom of God 'as a little child.' My little fellow, about four years old, whom I brought with me, gave himself no trouble amid the boats, omnibuses, and railway coaches, on sea, land, and in dark tunnels: his father was at his side, and never a care, or fear, or doubt, or anxiety had he. May we have grace to be led by the hand, and trust to the care and kindness of a reconciled God and Father![1]

3. The children do much for us; have we done our best to make the city fit for the boys and girls? In the prophet's vision Jerusalem is to be a city of truth and goodness, which is an index to the condition of public life in the coming Kingdom. As Jesus makes the child character the type of character in His Kingdom, so the child becomes the test of public life. The streets are to be such as children may play in without harm to their physical, their mental, or their spiritual nature. No impure literature will be offered for sale in those streets; no evil placards will deface its walls. But the truth is that behind the condition of the streets is the condition of the home—the whole stupendous problem of building up a new and better social order, where the love of the child will be before the love of gain. We spend our hundreds of millions on amusements, gambling, and drinking and grudge what is paid for education. And what about overcrowding and poverty and slums, and lack of playing-fields and open spaces? What about the utterly false values absorbed by almost nightly visits to Hollywood films? What about money flaunting itself before grinding poverty? What about the dead weight of the assumption that these things will always remain? We are too content with things as they are. If our hearts were instinct with the sympathy of Christ our placid acceptance of present conditions would be impossible. Think what it would be if the enormous resources of this present day, guided by fresh vision and noble ideals, were harnessed to the task of making every community a miniature city of God. Is it not the very genius of Christianity, says E. S. Woods, to throw up, not only a world-wide democratic brotherhood, but *local fellowships* where men may locally explore that co-operation in all worthy endeavour, that bearing of one another's burdens, that truly corporate joy in living which have always been the true marks of the Christian company since Christ first taught men to live together in love and joy and peace? Not, therefore, with misgivings and hesitations, but with hope and zest and a glad 'abandon,' let us fling ourselves into the task of making our city life worthy of the City of God and of the boys and girls who 'play in the streets thereof.'

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[1] Thomas Guthrie.

The Lowly King

Zech. ix. 9.—‘Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.’

1. One of the most remarkable things in the remarkable history of Israel was the way in which the nation clung to the idea of *kingship.* In spite of constant disappointments, in spite of weakness and folly and oppression and shameful sin among so many of their actual kings, the people never gave up the hope and expectation that at last the God-given king would arise and lead them to a great future. They looked back to David's glorious reign, and looked forward to a son of David establishing the throne in righteousness, a true ruler of men, a very signet ring on the hand of God.

The failure of their kings historically only drove them to enrich the idea of kingship and make it more spiritual, and to alter its features, till it became the beautiful picture of the later prophets. He was still a leader of men, still a hero who should establish righteousness and peace, and heal all the grievous evils of the body politic. But the ideal has changed from the ordinary strong king, warrior, and statesman, with the pomp of courts. The figure loses in external trappings, but becomes infinitely nobler, and gains in inward grace. In the school of God, through which the nation passed with much tribulation, they learned to look deeper for the real marks of kingship; and so we can trace the gradual growth in spiritual power of the idea.

Here, for example, in this passage of our text we see how the new glory of a beautiful character had impressed the nation in its expected deliverer. The passage is one of the most terrible in the Bible, full of judgment on the heathen who oppressed Israel, pronouncing doom by the whirlwind of war. But when the king is mentioned, who is to be the agent of God's will in the world, the tone softens as the prophetic figure is depicted of the kind of king he is to be. In the very heart of a passage which tells of war and war's desolation, with the flash of the arrow and the blast of the trumpet in it, there is inserted a beautiful picture of the Prince of Peace, in meekness and love riding into the city to establish His Kingdom, putting an end to the miseries and cruelties of war, speaking peace even to the heathen, and delivering the poor prisoners who languish for release with a hope which is almost despair.

‘Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee’—and such a King! Victorious indeed, but most of all in that he has conquered himself, and the marks of the conquest are on his character. He comes

Not armed in flame all glorious from afar,
Of hosts the chieftain and the lord of war,

but clothed in humility and peace. He comes, not riding on the horse, symbol of war and military triumph, but riding upon an ass, symbol of peace. This is the vision of the Messianic King who comes from God.

2. With absolute fidelity to the prophet's portrait could the Evangelist declare about Christ's last and triumphant entry into Jerusalem that in Him was fulfilled the word spoken by the prophet. More than the mere accuracy of detail, which in itself is nothing, is the fulfilment in the essential features of the portrait. ‘Behold thy King cometh unto thee, *meek,*’ so different from anything that the world looks for in kinghood, with none of the trappings of power, with none of the pomp and splendour of dominion; and yet regal in His moral majesty, grasping a spiritual empire before which all earthly sovereignty pales, establishing absolute supremacy over the hearts and lives of men. The manner of His riding into Jerusalem was nothing, except as another indication of the character of the sway He claimed as King. The manner was in keeping with the claim, and in keeping with all His appearing among men. The keynote of it was struck at the very beginning on that first Christmas morn, when the King came as a helpless child, loaded with disabilities of place and family and position in the world. The stable and the manger and all the other conditions of that birthday of Jesus in Bethlehem are only object-commentaries on the essential feature of His character and work. His life was consistent from the manger to the Cross, the same Prince of Peace in His triumphal entry to Jerusalem as in His humble entry in Bethlehem.

Yet in spite of the preparation for such a King by the prophets, in spite of the spiritualizing of the misconception of the Messianic King, when the King came unto His own, His own received Him not. 'There was no room for him in the inn'—that is also an object-commentary on the different kind of expectation which the Jews had regarding Him. It is easy to explain this. We only need to know a little of our own hearts, and the natural motives which rule us, to see why it was that a King meek and lowly, who based his jurisdiction not on external power, should be rejected and despised. The first natural appeal to which the heart leaps is to strength, to manifest strength. The first hero is the warrior king. The great soldier gains his empire over men's minds and imaginations most easily of all other forms of greatness.

Flash on us all in armour, thou Achilles,
Make our hearts dance to thy resounding tread.

Other kinds of greatness are not so evident; they have their seat in subtler regions; and moral and spiritual greatness is most difficult of all to recognize. It is not patent to the eye, unless it has combined with it advantages of place and worldly power, as with Marcus Aurelius, Stoic philosopher but also Roman Emperor. Our eyes are easily attracted by the glitter of evident power, whether of rank or wealth or position. Ordinary lordships over men find ready response. But only men of spiritual insight could recognize the supremacy of Christ amid all the signs of weakness and poverty and failure.

¶ Is it likely that men will see anything revealing in Christ so long as their attitude to life is like that of a young German who wrote recently in all seriousness about religion: 'Is it possible that the humble, contrite attitude of prayer can be postulated for the white races with their scientific conquests? Can a Christian disposition, with penitence, prayer, and revelation, arise in the clear mentality of the anti-Christ? Is it possible that this should be a joyfully-welcomed gift for a world which believes in itself? No! That would mean the surrender of bodily good for the sake of the spirit, a rejection of firm reality for shadowy soul-values, the vanishing of this world in an Eden-dream.'[1]

From the outside view, even the triumph of the moment seemed almost a burlesque, an extravaganza in burlesque imitation of a Roman Triumph, when the successful general rode into the city in the intoxicating pride of conquest. It seemed a mock majesty this of Jesus, with children and peasants for the serried ranks of soldiers, and branches of trees and cast-off garments for the royal purple; and an ass and the foal of an ass for chariots and horses. It is to the eyes of government only another edition of the stable and the manger. Yet in the eyes of the wise men there was no place in all the world so worshipful as that stable of Bethlehem; and to all spiritual insight, what can match for pathos and tragedy and greatness of soul that entry into the Passion at Jerusalem? It has *altered the world's centre*, altered even the centre of mankind's standard of judgment, and taught what the true greatness of life really is.

3. The revelation of God carries with it also a revelation of man. It throws light on what true human life should be. It is human life from the standpoint of eternity. In this rare atmosphere all externals fall from man. His worth is the worth of his naked soul. His judgment is the judgment of the spiritual qualities of character and life. In Christ we see deep into the meaning and value of human life. The title of king, which means the very pinnacle of human power, the title which of all names suggests the very pride of life, is shown here by a flash of revealing light with its true meaning given to it. Behold your King, the King of men, cometh, meek, lowly of heart, giving Himself up in humble service of others, giving Himself up even to the death, a true shepherd of the people.

In the light of Christ's birth and life and death, the world's standard of judgment is wrong. Sometimes even we with our dull eyes and gross hearts see it to be wrong. In spite of our adoration of success and worship of mere power, and love of the glory and pride of life, we see that the highest types of manhood and kinghood are in another region. The empire over men even now is given, not to mere greatness, as the world counts greatness, but to goodness, not to pride but to meekness, not to the strong who ride roughshod over men to attain their selfish ends but to the loving who touch us by their devotion, their sacrifice, their unselfishness. True power is attained only by the good. The meek inherit the earth after all; they inherit all that is best of the earth, though they may never possess a rood of it. The true king of men is the man of sympathy, the humble-hearted who lives for love. All earthly ambitions are mean and poor compared with this Divine ambition to serve men and to bless human lives.

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[1] F. B. Macnutt, *From Chaos to God*, 37.

¶ A Hindu Nationalist said, ‘There are two great words gripping the soul of India at the present time, and those words are “service” and “self-sacrifice.” No man is being considered great any more unless he embodies these two ideals.’[1]

¶ In C. R. Kennedy’s drama of the Crucifixion,[2] the Captain of the Guard, talking with Mary the Mother of Jesus, says: ‘I am a soldier. I have been helping to build kingdoms for over twenty years. I have never known any other trade. Soldiery, bloodshed, murder; that’s my business. My hands are crimson with it. That’s what empire means. . . . I tell you, woman, this dead son of yours, disfigured, shamed, spat upon, has built a kingdom this day that can never die. The living glory of him rules it. The earth is *his* and he made it. He and his brothers have been moulding and making it through long ages; they are the only ones who ever really did possess it: not the proud; not the idle; not the wealthy; not the vaunting empires of the world. Something has happened up here on this hill to-day to shake all our kingdoms of blood and fear to dust. The earth is his, the earth is theirs, and they made it. The meek, the terrible meek, the fierce agonizing meek, are about to enter into their inheritance.’

The Secret of Strength

Zech. xii. 8.—‘In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them.’

In that kingdom of the prophet’s vision the weakest were to become strong as David, the great hero of the nation; and the representatives of the ancient royal house of David were to be mightier than before. In the strength of the Almighty the people would be able to resist and to overcome all their foes. This promise, justly interpreted, signifies that in Christ humanity shall realize royal strength, and shall yet triumph over all enemies.

1. The mass of men fail to realize the latent power that is in them, and this very largely by no fault of their own. Circumstances never call it forth. The opportunity that kindles the soul never occurs, and multitudes remain largely unaware of that intrinsic greatness which is more than all beside.

But from time to time events occur which awaken the dormant energies of the soul, and men hitherto unknown start up in heroic proportions. Misfortune sometimes reveals our strength. In days of ease and affluence men may show no particular energy of mind or depth of character, but adversity puts them on their mettle and they reveal the highest qualities. Opposition will sometimes effect the transformation. When Curran was mocked for his stammering, his soul took fire and henceforth he was known as one of the world’s chief speakers. Love effects marvellous expansions and exaltations. Everybody knows how, under the influence of the sublime passion, Quintin Matsys grew out of a blacksmith into a great painter. Extraordinary opportunity and impulse startle obscure men into greatness. Clive and Warren Hastings were only clerks in the service of the East India Company, but under the stress of extraordinary difficulty and the solicitation of rare opportunity they developed splendid military and administrative talents.

The most striking illustration, however, of the awakening of human nature, of the weak becoming strong and glorious, is found in the Kingdom of God. A noble religion quickens a man’s intellectual powers, rendering him energetic and capable in all relations; but especially in his moral life is he conscious of a new conquering force. He is strong to deal with the almost infinite temptations of life. He is strong to confront the trials and sufferings which are the heritage of our race. He is strong to battle with the vices and passions of society, no matter however rampant and invincible those vices and passions may seem. He is strong to strike a blow for the emancipation of classes and peoples crushed beneath ancestral sins and superstitions. Where other men yield at once to the assailing temptation, or acquiesce with sullen and despairing soul in sorrow and death, there the man of faith is confident and invincible.

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[1] E. Stanley Jones, *Christ at the Round Table*, 187.
[2] *The Terrible Meek.*

2. While religious faith always and everywhere elicits the energies of men, the faith of Christ is calculated in an extraordinary degree to excite their moral valour and efficiency.

(1) In Christ we have *the most exalted conception of God*. It is a favourite theory with some thinkers that the god of any people is simply and exactly a reflection of its own character. 'I was forced to acknowledge that the personal Deity might, after all, be nothing but a mirage—a magnificent image of humanity—or, as I expressed it, a Brocken spectre, projected by the human consciousness upon the mists of the unknown. . . . That the master races of the world, the modern Europeans, should have embraced and evolved the purest and highest religion, appeared to me natural. My metaphor of the Brocken spectre covered this fact; for a giant creates a more splendid phantom than a dwarf.' But surely the Jehovah of Sinai was no reflection of the character of the horde of slaves who encamped at the mountain base. If their God had been a reflection of their own spirit, He would have been as the deities of pagan peoples. It is clear that the Hebrew conception of God was infinitely above them in purity and beauty. And just as they were faithful to their great ideal of the true and living God they were possessed by a passion for righteousness. They grasped the fact of His eternal truth and justice and purity, and it was this apprehension of the moral perfection of Jehovah that gave the Jewish nation coherence, tenacity, heroism; that made them strong to resist mighty corruptions, to sustain unexampled sorrows, to offer the costliest sacrifices in the cause of righteousness.

¶ If we can fancy any human creature standing on the ruins of Westminster Bridge and surveying the desolation that was once called London, it will not be Lord Macaulay's mythical New Zealander—it will be a Jew. In the presence of this strange race all the people of modern Europe are but children just out of school; for the Jew had a literature and a philosophy when our forefathers were barbarians and worshipped blocks of wood and stone. And as one surveys that literature and philosophy; as one endeavours to arrive at the secret hidden in all this long, chequered, pathetic and sublime history, one fact continually emerges: the greatest periods of the nation coincide with the periods when the sense of religion was strongest among the people: the most terrible downfalls and dispersions with the loss of that religious sense.[1]

Yet in Christ we have a more perfect vision of God, and a more intimate fellowship with Him than any granted to the Jew. Christ declared the justice, the righteousness, the Fatherhood of God with a power and fullness altogether new. He brought God near to us. Dr Duncan says: 'It is the great glory of God's revelation that it has changed our abstracts into concretes.' The Incarnation has made the Eternal, in all the glory of His holiness and love, and in all the reality and perfection of His government, appreciable to the human consciousness and heart.

(2) In Christ we have *the noblest ideal of humanity*. The greatest benefactors of the race are those who have given it a lofty conception of itself, and Christ has done this in a unique degree. Amiel says: 'Great men are the true men, the men in whom Nature has succeeded. They are not extraordinary—they are in the true order. It is the other species of men who are not what they ought to be.' But who has made this manifest as Christ has done? He stands before us in all His majesty and purity and love as 'the proper man.' What He was is precisely what all men ought to be. Weakness, meanness, sinfulness, and misery are the characteristics of abnormal humanity. Greatness and grace characterize the true humanity. David is quoted in the text as the hero of the Old Testament; but how much more glorious is the Hero of the New! It is sometimes objected that Christ has not glorified the masculine and the heroic. But in truth the courage of Christ was the supreme expression of the highest type of courage. The courage that confronts sin, and that strives unto blood resisting sin in any of its myriad forms, is far more sublime than any prowess on the field of battle.

The fact of Christ's tenderness should not hide from us the greatness of His strength. A wonderful pity and grace are often found in lionhearted men. Luther was full of affection. Think of Cromwell watching by his daughter. Garibaldi was tender as a woman. Gordon was deeply affectionate, fond of little children, full of the spirit of sympathy and sacrifice. And this mingling of strength and sweetness finds its supreme illustration in Jesus Christ.

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[1] W. J. Dawson, *The Divine Challenge*, 162.

¶ Replying to one who contended that Jesus was effeminate, Wendell Phillips said: 'You speculate as to whether Jesus was a masculine character. Look at the men who have learned of Him most closely—at Paul, and Luther, and Wesley. Were they effeminate? Yet the disciple is but a faint reflection of his Master. The character from which came the force which has been doing battle ever since with wrong, and falsehood, and error was nothing less than masculine; sentiment is the toughest thing in the world—nothing else is iron.'

¶ Nietzsche only gave expression to a thought vaguely present in the minds of many men when he impeached the slave morality of Jesus. But he was wrong. It needs more courage to be meek than to be arrogant, it needs more strength to be merciful than to be vindictive; self-sacrifice is nobler than self-assertiveness; it is a manlier thing to serve with Jesus than to conquer with Thor.[1]

(3) In the gift of the Spirit we have *the largest measure of moral force.* Science tells us that there is always the same amount of force in the world; it may be more or less demonstrated, but the sum total of material energy never varies. It is palpable, however, that the amount of spiritual energy in the world has varied immensely. And it is the grand characteristic of this later age that God has given us, in extraordinary degree, that spiritual energy by which men realize all lofty ideals of character, of nationality, of civilization. At Pentecost, out of timid, vacillating, obscure tax collectors and fishermen arose the majestic apostles, whose mighty work has changed the face of the world. That same Spirit is with us—the lifting power, the transforming power, the perfecting power. And if the Hebrew attained such moral eminence and mastery, how glorious in holiness should we be when the Spirit, given in His fullness, worketh in us mightily!

It may be said that there is really very little true strength and greatness in many Christian lives. But it is our fault if this is the case. Gardeners usually seek to bring their trees to the fullest perfection and glory, but one of the peculiar features of Japanese horticulture is the production of dwarf trees. They are no mere plants, but true trees, some of them a century old, yet attaining a height of only two or three feet. In order to hinder their growth, the trees are transplanted to pots which do not contain enough soil to nourish their branches. If any buds appear, they are nipped. As the result of this starvation and spoliation the tree puts forth no new buds, and remains a dwarf the whole of its life. What a picture of the way in which we treat our nobler life! We are ever starving and limiting it. If we only did half as much to foster our best life as we do to restrict it, we should not be lacking as we are in grand experience and features, but should share the massive grandeur of the trees of Lebanon.

The Evasions of a False Prophet

Zech. xiii. 4-6.—'And it shall come to pass in that day, that the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive: but he shall say, I am no prophet, I am an husbandman; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth. And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.'

THERE are numerous passages scattered throughout the Old Testament which foreshadow the coming of Christ and the sufferings He was destined to undergo. The evangelists and the apostolic writers of the New Testament quote many of them in connection with incidents which they record, or arguments which they develop. On the way to Emmaus, our Lord Himself, we are told, 'began from Moses and from all the prophets and interpreted to Cleopas and his friend, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself.' But the fact that the Old Testament is rich in such Messianic forecasts does not justify us in straining the sense of every possible passage until it can be made to yield a reference to the Person or work of Christ. The verses which form the text provide us with a case in point. The mere circumstance of a mention of 'wounds in the hands' has led many readers to conclude that the words contain a direct prophetic allusion to the Passion of our Lord. But if they are considered in the light of their setting it will quickly be seen that such a view is erroneous.

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[1] J. H. B. Masterman.

'It shall come to pass in that day,' says the prophet. The day to which he refers is a day of national repentance and religious awakening. He anticipates a turning on the part of the people, from their idolatrous customs and sinful habits, to the living and true God. How real and deep he expects the contrition of his fellow-countrymen to be is shown by the fact that he describes 'the land as mourning, every family apart.' In other words, the penitence of Israel was not to be of that outward and ceremonial kind which an official decree was capable of calling forth. Households were to be affected with genuine human sorrow. Men and women, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters were to be smitten in their consciences. Startled out of their insensibility by the Spirit of conviction and self-condemned, they were to realize their need of Divine forgiveness, and to experience the mercy of God towards them. 'That day' was to be a day of revival. The grace of God was to be manifested in the most striking fashion. In the abundance and spontaneousness of its outpouring, it would be like 'the opening of a fountain to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.'

What this prophecy seems to point to is an event of tremendous significance which has not yet occurred, namely, a national repentance on the part of Israel. Only that nation which crucified their long-expected King could exhibit a grief of the character and intensity described in the previous chapter. 'And nothing,' as Dr Marcus Dods says, 'would go further towards the conversion of the world than were the Jews to complete their marvellous history by once again combining, and this time to acknowledge Him, whom they pierced, as the Christ, their and the world's King. The agony of remorse would be terrible. But what event could be so exemplary to the world? Who could be such missionaries as those from whom the apostles sprang, and who are now found in every nation and speaking every language of the world?' The apostle Paul evidently looked forward to this epoch, and anticipated from its occurrence consequences of the most momentous kind. 'If,' he says in his letter to the Romans, 'If the casting away of the Jews be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?'

The writer is under no delusion with regard to the extent to which the new spirit will prevail, and pervade the nation, in 'that day.' Without rendering himself open to the charge of taking a pessimistic view of human nature, he shows that he is well acquainted with the shiftiness and shallowness of the heart of man. He reckons on there being some who will not be affected with a genuine spirit of contrition. The movement will not touch the false prophets, those whose interest lay in the maintenance of the old idolatrous customs, and whose trade will be menaced by the reforming zeal of the time. Such persons, feeling no salutary pangs of repentance and having no personal experience of the forgiving and cleansing grace of God, will be driven to sore straits in their efforts to escape the wrath of their friends and their fellow-countrymen. How they will behave in those circumstances is the subject which he deals with in the verses which form the text.

1. 'They shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough (or hairy) mantle to deceive.'

The movement would certainly not touch the false prophets—the men who encouraged in evil the rank and file of the people—in the sense that it would alter their sympathies and make them eager to assist in promoting the ideals which inspired it. But the change in the social and religious atmosphere would have some effect on these persons. It would make them ashamed and afraid of their ways. They would be obliged for their own sakes to abstain from letting their voices be heard in public. None of them would venture to wear the 'hairy mantle' which was the traditional badge of their profession. They would clothe themselves like ordinary people, and try to encourage the impression that they were anything but traitors in the camp.

A religious movement, quickening, as it is bound to do, the public conscience, invariably has an effect of this kind. It cannot convert men. The influence which proceeds from other people's lives is not able to produce a radical change of heart in the case of any individual. The Spirit of God can alone accomplish that result. But a manifest awakening on the part of a community as a whole to the demands of righteousness, justice, and purity can and does make those who traffic in sin uncomfortable. The shelter of darkness is sought by them, and they skulk in the shadows instead of parading their iniquity in the light. Society roused and in earnest over the question of its moral welfare is able to bring about that condition of things. It can shame and frighten the votaries of wickedness.

2. ‘ But he shall say, I am no prophet, I am an husbandman ; for man taught me to keep cattle (or, for I have been a bondman) from my youth.’

If challenged regarding his vocation the false prophet will take refuge in a lie. He will protest that he is a boor, a bucolic individual, a rude and unlettered yokel. Even if he had wanted to become a so-called prophet, he will declare, he could never have had the chance of setting up as such. From his youth, he will go on to explain, he has not been able to call himself his own master. He has always been in the service of others as a bondman.

A lie is still regarded by many people as the most convenient device for extricating themselves from a disagreeable situation. One of the most lamentable features of a good deal of recent fiction, as distinguished from the great novels of last century, is the facility in lying which is attributed by authors to their characters. Without experiencing, apparently, the slightest qualms of conscience, men and women are represented as successfully avoiding the consequences of their deeds, or disentangling themselves from perplexing circumstances, by the simple expedient of a falsehood. The difficulty out of which they get, as far as their relations with other characters in the story are concerned, is elaborately described. The difficulty into which they get with God and their own sense of the authority of the moral law is passed over. Books of that type (and they are only too numerous), and such plays as proceed on the same lines, do incalculable harm. For the recognition of the distinction between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood, is fundamental to the consciousness of man, and gives him the capacity for experiences that distinguish him from the brute creation. The greatest novelists and dramatists have realized that fact, and their delineations of character, as well as their descriptions of the development of events, have been based on the validity and significance of it. When it is ignored, another world than that in which we live, and other beings than those that we are, are staged by the author for the presentation of the realities of human life.

¶ Darwin opens his chapter on the moral sense with this acknowledgment : ‘ I fully subscribe to the judgment of those writers who maintain that, of all the differences between man and the lower animals, the moral sense or conscience is by far the most important. This sense is summed up in that short but imperious word, “ ought,” so full of high significance. It is the most noble of all the attributes of man.’ [1]

3. ‘ And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands ? (or, between thine arms ?) Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.’

The questioner, who has just elicited the reply from the disguised false prophet that he is a tiller of the ground, is represented as not being satisfied. He has noticed suspicious scars of the kind that people were in the habit of inflicting on themselves in the performance of idolatrous rites. Pointing to these compromising marks of self-mutilation, he puts the straight question to the man : ‘ What are these wounds on thy breast ? ’ But the false prophet is not to be caught. Rather than acknowledge himself in his true character, he is prepared to surrender all his sense of dignity and humiliate himself to the uttermost. ‘ These wounds,’ he answers with a leer, ‘ are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.’ In other words, he finds it necessary to tell a second lie in order to support the first. And this time he does not hesitate to sacrifice the last shreds of his reputation. Rather than admit the truth he pretends that the wounds have been inflicted upon him in some debauch.

¶ A wilful falsehood told is a cripple not able to stand by itself, without some to support it ; it is easy to tell a lie, hard to tell but a lie.[2]

The conclusion of the incident represents the false prophet as having escaped detection. He got off : he saved his life. But such a saving of one’s life is really a losing of it. To his sin as a false prophet he added that of being a liar. The wounds on his body were likely to disappear in course of time, but the scars on his character were festering sores, which the falsehood he uttered only rendered more corrupt and malignant. Detection, so far from being the undoing of guilty persons, may be and often is the occasion of their salvation. Nothing is accomplished by lying except the deterioration of character, and the acceleration of the process of moral degeneration.

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[1] *The Descent of Man*, i. 70.

[2] Thomas Fuller.

¶ 'Success,' said an English judge recently, when passing sentence on a criminal, 'might have covered the fraud and prevented discovery, but success cannot turn fraud into honesty; and the disgrace of fraud lies in its commission, and not in its discovery.'

The true disgrace of all sin lies in its commission, and not in its discovery by our fellow-men. A person may manage to make amends to those whom he has deceived or injured, and keep himself right with them by repairing the losses he has inflicted on them. This he may even contrive to do without suffering the humiliation of exposure as a dishonest person. But whether found out or not, whether able to undo the consequences of his conduct or not, a man comes under the judgment of God by his transgressions. The amplest restitutions cannot efface his guilt. A sincere penitent will labour to render them and be filled with shame and sorrow till the end of his days, but he will cast himself for forgiveness upon the mercy of Him who alone can speak peace to the conscience of man, and cover his sins.

The City of Desire

Zech. xiv. 20, 21.—'In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts; and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts.'

THE desire for a city of ordered wellbeing, secure peace, and gladdening beauty has haunted the heart of all generations. Empire builders have striven to realize their conceptions in cities built beside pleasant waters, whose stately buildings, wide streets, and lovely gardens would shelter a people dwelling in felicity. Nineveh and Babylon, Athens and Rome, with many another city of the past, were founded to embody these high ideals. Yet they all failed. From their failure daring thinkers turned to describe their conceptions of a city yet to be. From Pythagoras and Plato to Sir Thomas More and William Morris they have imagined their Utopias from which poverty and pain should be banished. All these dreams have been nothing but dreams. The problem of the city of desire is with us still.

To the Hebrew prophets there came also this vision and passion of desire for a city of order and beauty. They discerned the fatal flaw in all past endeavours, and the blot on every fair dream. They knew that no city of enduring loveliness could be built upon a secular order and a material basis. They realized the truth that in all such cities there are inherent causes of corruption and decay. The Hebrew prophets struck a new note in their ideal—the note of holiness. The city yet to be must be a city of God. When holiness is the supreme passion of the people, so that there shall be nothing unclean, nothing profane, in their thought and life, the city of secure peace and ordered wellbeing shall be built.

In the text one of these prophets has set the truth in vivid and homely images. When we analyse it we find it presents three pictures. It displays holiness in three chief spheres of human energy. The first is *the sphere of work*; the second is *the sphere of worship*; and the third is *the sphere of the home*. In the concluding sentence the prophet discloses the secret which lies behind the realization of this holiness.

1. *The Sphere of Work.*—'In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord.'

The prophet sees upon the bells of the horses the inscription which was engraved only on the High Priest's mitre, 'Holiness unto the Lord.' What is the meaning of that declaration? The horse was a secular animal, used exclusively for commercial and war-like purposes. The text thus declares that the commerce of the streets should be consecrated to God; that God lays His hand upon it and claims to rule in it, and that therefore men should aim at making their commerce such that God can write 'Holiness unto the Lord' upon it.

¶ The first change wrought by Christianity upon architecture was the transference of the basilica into the Christian church. The basilica was the gathering-place of the Romans; here they transacted their business, here they held their tribunals, and engaged themselves in the ordinary duties of life, and it was the basilica which the early Christians consecrated to the service of God.[1]

The simplest of all sanctities is the sanctity of labour. If the men and women who carry on the city's industries are dishonest in their dealing the city cannot endure in peace. Holiness must be engraved on the bells of the horses—on the least detail of every man's toil. The manufacturer must put his conscience into his product. He must put his heart into his dealing with his employees. The merchant must be a man of unfaltering uprightness, with a spirit too high for greed, and too honourable to take any man at a disadvantage. The workman must be noble in his ideal, and be inspired by a sense of honour in all his service. Holiness should be the mark of every turn of the hand. When this spirit of entire consecration rests upon men in the daily tasks of their common toil, the city of desire shall arise in peace and splendour. But whatever may have been the hopes of those who founded it, and the prayers of those who love it, the city which loses this note of sanctity in its labour shall pass into dust and bear the reproach of its shame.

¶ In *The Stones of Venice* Ruskin describes the high ideals, the self-denying industry, and the unfailing integrity of those who founded that ancient city. He records the poverty of their beginning and the sternness of their toil as they built their homes amidst the marshes of the northern Adriatic. He describes the solemn thoughts which inspired their leaders and took shape alike in the ordered wellbeing of the people and in the noble artistry of their buildings. He traces these back to that consecration to God which lifted up the heart of the humblest craftsmen, as well as the heart of the rulers. But the years came when a mean covetousness held the people in its sway. Venice became unfaithful to its ideal. Gross passions desecrated their hearts. Then Venice, once so powerful, still so fair, fell from her high dominion.

2. *The Sphere of Worship.*—'And the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar.'

The prophet passes from the highway into the Temple. He stands before the altar. He sees the bowls of costly beauty in which the sacrifices were seethed. These bowls were kept with peculiar care. But he remembered the pots, the common pots used in the menial offices of the Temple. These often lay in neglected corners, uncleansed and uncared for. But in that day when holiness shall be the dominant note, and there shall be nothing secular, nothing common, nothing profane, the very pots shall be as fit for sacrifice as the bowls of the priest's office.

It may seem strange that the prophet should insist on this note of holiness in worship. There, at least, it might be thought that holiness would be both the law and the attainment. But there is no place where it is so easy to be unreal as in the place of prayer, and there is no hour when we are so tempted to be insincere as the hour of worship. There may be a worship which is an idle show, a mere ceremonial, a sensuous delight. The supreme grace of worship is 'to worship the Father in spirit and in truth.' The supreme temptation is to be careful of the form, and heedless of the spirit; to give time and thought to the public observances, and neglect the hidden devotion of the private hour. We bow our heads in the house of prayer, but we fail to bow our hearts. We care for the bowls of the altar. We are heedless of the pots. Yet only when these searching realities and inward purities are regarded, and the spirit of truth shall pervade and penetrate every act of our worship, shall this dominant note of holiness become the inspiring music of every man who bows in the house of prayer.

¶ Carlyle has set this truth in one of his touching reminiscences. He recalls the humble place of prayer in which his first worshipping hours were spent. He describes the peasant folk who gathered for worship, their little heath-thatched building, and the simple evangelist who was their teacher and guide. Then he is stirred to his tribute. 'That poor temple of my childhood is more sacred to me than the biggest cathedral then extant could have been; rude, rustic, bare, no temple in the world was more so; but there were sacred lambencies, tongues of authentic flame, which kindled what was best in one, what has not yet gone out.'[1]

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[1] J. Burns.

[1] Froude, *Thomas Carlyle*, i. 12.

3. *The Sphere of the Home.*—' Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts; and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them and seethe therein.'

The prophet passes from the Temple into the home. He realizes that the home is the innermost sanctuary. He is drawing a picture of the housewife in her daily service. He marks the vessels of her simple and homely labour. He sees this woman of the holy city keep these common pots in which she cooks her children's food clean and sweet with sedulous care. He points out the significance of the clean dish. For the care and the cleansing of the common utensil is always the sure mark of the conscientious and scrupulous conduct of the whole life of the home. Such is the keeping of her common vessels by this woman busy in the simple tasks of her life, that when the pilgrims crowd the streets, at the time of the Passover, they can take these pots and use them as bowls for the sacrifices.

The sanctity of labour and the sanctity of worship cannot be attained without the sanctity of the home. The holiness which does not consecrate the lowliest tasks of the household life is not the holiness of Christ. The fulfilment of the daily duties, the wearing drudgeries, and the constant sacrifices of the home constitute a true priesthood to God. When the unfailing loyalties, the tender patiences, the pure affections, and, above all, the solemn and devout recollection of God and of His will, are cherished within the home, the men and women who build the city of desire will be found coming forth in the strength of the enduement of the Spirit of God.

¶ Take up Matthew Arnold's record of the life and intercourse of his father's household, and you will understand not only the tradition of Rugby School, but the wistful and eager devotion that never died out of the heart of his son. Read the witness to the prayerfulness of the father of John G. Paton, and mark the atmosphere of a home maintained amidst the demands of a constant frugality which was nevertheless potent with the power of God's Spirit. There is no holier memory that any man can recall than the home in whose atmosphere he inbreathed the Spirit of God.

The prophet, as he concludes, touches the secret of it all. ' And in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts.'

The word ' Canaanite ' stands here for all that is alien to God, hostile to His will, defiling to His people. The city that could receive and permit the Canaanite within its holy place was no longer loyal to God. Recall the arresting proof of that truth in the story of the cleansing of the Temple by Jesus. It was a place not only of peculiar sanctity, but of special delight to Him. He had called it, in His youth, ' My Father's house.' At a glance the disloyalty of the people and the corruption of their faith broke upon Him. He found the Canaanite in the house of the Lord. The traders had edged in from without the gate and set up their bargaining within the sanctuary. In an act prophetic of His ministry, He made His scourge of small cords, overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and drove out the polluting cattle. With the Canaanite in the holy place there could be no city of God.

The day of the Temple has passed away, for God's holy place is the house of the soul. ' Ye are the temple of the Holy Ghost.' But there the Canaanite can still be found. There, a defiant self-will, a merciless greed, a self-indulgence which descends to baser passions, and a constant rebellion against truth and purity, still carry on their commerce. We must cast out and cleanse the temple of the soul before holiness can be the note of our work, and our worship, and our home.

THE BOOK OF MALACHI

INTRODUCTION

We call Malachi the last of the Prophets because in our version his book closes the Old Testament canon. But, apart even from later apocryphal writers, it is really the Book of Jonah that should stand last of all in chronological sequence. And for sentimental reasons this is to be welcomed, for it leaves a certain jar of feeling if Malachi is put last, and we are left in the parting word of the Old Testament with a message of impending doom, ' lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.' This is not an ideal ending either in religion or literary art; for how much more comforting and evangelic it is to read in the final verse of *Jonah* the God-revealing utterance, 'Should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle ? ' The revised chronology gives us this fine ending, and it comforts our heart to let the last word of the older scripture be just there, where 'mercy rejoices over judgment.' The man of sentiment, and the mind of the critic are alike satisfied; even if the harmony is disturbed when we come to examine the name of the book.

I

Name or Title

Malachi means ' My Messenger,' and hereupon there has ensued a keen discussion, whether we are to take the word as a personal name, or a descriptive title. In grammar it may mean either, and scholars cannot entirely make up their minds which to choose. Where critics are divided the plain man is tempted to ask *Cui bono* ? That is to say, " A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." But if we decide to call the book anonymous there is a good reason for its being so. Sir George Adam Smith concludes, 'The prophet, writing from the midst of a poor and persecuted group of the people, and attacking the authorities both of Church and State, preferred (presumably for safety's sake) to publish his charge anonymously. His name was in *" the Lord's own book of remembrance."* ' (Mal. iii. 16). And the value of the book as Holy Scripture does not suffer. For on that point Principal Denney has said what may well be the final word of reassurance, ' The Word of God infallibly carries God's power to save men's souls. That is the only infallibility I believe in. Authority is not authorship.' Thus the debate concerning the writer of our book is apt to leave both the preacher and the ordinary man cold. Fortified to know that nothing vital hangs upon it, they leave subtleties alone, and resolve to get on with the book. That is the preacher's business —' The great outlines of the shining golden letters are clearly visible, and in our acts of worship our business is with things holy.'

But in the expository preaching which we are all exhorted to practise, the discovery of the historical setting, the historical background is even for edification of first importance; to set the picture in its appropriate frame, and let theology and its backgrounds enrich religion. Therefore we ask what are the water-lines in Malachi's book ? What has it to say for itself ?

II

The Background in History

There are watermarks in the book which plainly indicate that the author was a younger contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah, whose reforms he supported; and wrote his book, or held his conferences, to reinforce the revival they were to inaugurate, and to give his answers to doubters or opponents. If we require a date for Malachi we may take 458 B.C., less or more, as near enough to satisfy most recent authorities. Judah with its diminished territory was then a province of Persia and ruled by a Persian deputy, to whom the prophet refers as ' thy governor ' (i. 8). The Temple had been restored, though the golden forecasts of the former prophets had failed to materialize, and ' where we looked for crowns to fall, there comes the tug—that's all.' It was an age of disillusionment where religion, except in select circles, had fallen on evil times and evil days. ' The dawn for a season was frustrate.' Influences from the outside world of great nations were beating upon the hitherto secluded life of Israel. A new race of freethinkers had risen, some of them sincere, but others lax and irresponsible, and sceptical questions, hitherto rare, began to be common. 'The troubles and social anomalies which they saw about them led them to question God's justice, and to doubt whether He would ever interpose to distinguish between the evil and the good.' Even the sincere doubters, says Dr Driver 'were deficient in spirituality; hence they were impatient, and complained that when they humbled themselves, their humiliation passed unheeded and brought their country no relief.'[1] Just the questions that appear and reappear in any age of reaction. We know it, alas! too well. Those who have lived through the last twelve years of spent hopes know the bitterness, the religious inertia and the helplessness of such a time. John Buchan describes the situation for Scotland in the first half of the seventeenth century, but his words are of general application: 'There come epochs when a nation seems to move from the sun into the twilight, when the free ardour of youth is crippled by hesitations, when the eyes turn inward and instinct gives place to questioning.'[2] We all know the meaning of that. On Armistice Day, it has been said, this country was really religious, but heaven's dew went early away, and we are what we are afraid to say.

This was also the situation in the time of Malachi: moral insensibility combined with keen intellectual activity and the questioning spirit. With these foes of his own household the prophet contended in his brave and honest little book. He too had known the bitterness of hope deferred, and his prophecy in many an allusion reflects the temper of his age, and his efforts to restore his own soul and that of his people. For he lived in their winter of discontent: 'the summer was past, the harvest was ended, and they were not saved.' This is surely the background against which the book is to be interpreted, a book, as we shall see, that gives many applications to the life of to-day.

III

The Style

A word may be said on the style and literary method of Malachi. Those who feel that his book is tame and 'prosy' in comparison with the ideal glories of the great prophets when to be alive was very heaven, may be excused for their criticism. We have referred to the religious reaction, but there was a literary reaction as well, similar to the temper or time-spirit under which we ourselves are living. 'In Israel an age of creative genius had given way to an age of learning, of criticism and of history.' Intellectualism, legalism, and other *isms* had choked the wells of poetry and prophecy; the Greek dialectic of question and answer had drowned the prophetic fire.

'Though it has not pleased God to save the people by dialectic,' this now became the mode in Israel. Malachi's book was written, not spoken; as we may see in its deliberate and ordered argument, which smells more of the study than of the streets and squares of Jerusalem that had once been the prophet's pulpit. He is a teacher, and not a preacher, is indeed one of the forerunners of scholastic Rabbinism. Dr Driver aptly sums up the manner and style of the book; 'Malachi first states briefly the truth which he desires to enforce, then follows the objection which it is supposed to provoke, finally comes the prophet's reply reasserting and substantiating his original proposition.' Not rhetorical appeal, but argument by question and answer is an exposition favoured in the schools of the time, which ultimately became the prevalent one in later Jewish books.

IV

The Religious Ideas of Malachi

1. *The Argument of Love.*—In virtue of his opening sentences, Malachi has his place in the goodly fellowship of the prophets, for in the forefront of his book he relies for an audience on the compelling word, 'I have loved you, saith the Lord,' a union of hearts, with love and affection on the Divine side, and demanding a corresponding love and affection on the other. Though Malachi can be threatening enough, he nevertheless relies on love as the master key which opens all doors. Thus, he is in the true evangelical succession of those who say, 'I believe in love'; what can love do, what can it not do? Love is enough.

2. *The Worshipping Heart.*—But the temper of the priests was far from that. *Sabbath-keeping* had fallen into neglect, and to the

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[1] *Century Bible*, 324.

[2] *Montrose*, 15.

priests even the Temple service had become monotonous task-work. The day had long passed when a worshipper looked forward to the day of Communion with the feeling which vibrates in the Psalm: 'I will go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea upon the harp will I praise Thee, O God, my God' (Ps. xliii. 4). But Malachi's people had said in their heart, 'The table of the Lord is contemptible.' Irreverence, religious tiredness, and a grudging spirit had invaded the innermost shrine,—the sin of Accidie. Yet God did not miss His little human praise.

3. *Attitude to the Heathen World.*—Here and there in Malachi's book there is a fierce and intolerant nationalism, but he makes up for it in a glowing outburst of pure universalism where all barriers are down. In contrast to the irreverent and parsimonious worship of Israel he proclaims, 'From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered unto my name, and a pure offering, for my name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of hosts.' So startling and almost unprecedented is this appreciation of the worthiness of the worship at heathen altars, that Malachi's words have been taken as a *prophecy* of the final ingathering of all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues. But it is *fact* and not prophecy, for he refers to the offerings made in his own time, and this must rule the interpretation. We find a like thought in the psalm—'All men shall throng to Thee' (lxv. 2); and in the New Testament Church, when Paul assured the men of Lycaonia —'The bountiful Giver did not leave Himself without a witness among the nations'; and more fully, in the speech to the Athenians, Paul preached the gospel of the Unknown God, 'close to each one of us, for it is in Him that we live and move and have our being—Him whom in your ignorance you worship.' One remembers Longfellow's beautiful picture of the heart of heathendom

In even savage bosoms
There are longings, yearnings, strivings,
For the good they comprehend not.
That the feeble hands and helpless,
Groping blindly in the darkness
Touch God's right hand in that darkness
And are lifted up and strengthened.

It is the wings of the morning—'the true (real) light which enlightens every man' (John i. 9). Malachi is a watcher of the Dawn among all nations.

4. *The Priesthood of Knowledge.*—In this phrase Sir George Adam Smith describes Malachi's incomparable picture of the true priest, not of the sacraments or of 'a vague religiosity,' but the priesthood of knowledge. To-day we hear certain schools of religion protesting that God does not need a preacher's learning; but the sufficient answer has been made, God needs his ignorance still less. We quote the words, taking them home to our business and to our hearts as the ideal of the true priest in whatever church he is found, 'The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips; he walked with me in peace and uprightness, and did turn many away from iniquity'; as Chaucer said of the poor parson of a town—

Criste's love and his apostles twelve
He taught, and first he followed it himselve.

5. *The Humanity of Malachi.*—He was a great human who did not close his eyes to the social wrongs that sin against humble, helpless people. His words are a charter of human rights and obligations, 'I will come near to you to judgment, against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right'—the social gospel. Further, among these depressed classes he remembers the crying sin of the time that broke the marriage law, the facility of divorce and the cruelty of men who with a roving eye dealt treacherously 'against the wife of their youth; she is thy companion and the wife of thy covenant.' This wrong, Malachi says, covers the altar of God with tears, with weeping, and with sighing. Is he not a modern?

6. *Good Thoughts in Bad Times.*—The phrase is Bishop Moule's, who recalls the comforting thought that the heart of the Church is always sound which has in it the quiet, humble people who do not strive nor cry, but 'reassure each other with thoughts of faith and trust,'—'They that feared the Lord spake one with another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name.'

There is space for two more pictures; '*the man who gives God a chance*' is described. 'Prove me now herewith, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.' And this for *family life, and family affection*; what home-lovers these old Hebrews were, the forerunners of the fairest thing on earth, the Christian home! Malachi looks forward to the appearance of a great man, who will make it his business to save the homes of the people. There were men in Israel, they are everywhere, who would put old heads on young shoulders, and children also, who forget the warning Benjamin Jowett addressed to his students, 'Gentlemen, none of us is infallible, not even the youngest.' To these, Malachi, the prophet of family life, makes the dazzling promise, 'And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.'

W. M. Grant.

Jacob and Esau

Mal. i. 2, 3.—'Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau.'

1. All through the Old Testament and through the teaching of St Paul a prominent idea is that the selection of the descendants of Jacob and the rejection of the descendants of Esau is the key to the history of the world. 'I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau' are the words in which the prophet Malachi finds a sufficient explanation of the mission of Israel to the nations. And the words are taken up by St Paul, who is careful to remind his countrymen that this mysterious favour was not shown to them by way of partiality or that they might have a monopoly of grace, but rather because they were to be the instruments used by God in the recovery of mankind from sin.

We do not vex ourselves now with abstruse speculations as to the methods of such election. Nor does the story of Edom and Israel need for its interpretation any resort to theological metaphysics. The difference in the fortunes of these two closely allied peoples springs out of the difference between the two founders of their race. And if we ask why, do we need any other answer than this, that the characters of the two men were so strangely diverse? Inheritance and environment are responsible for much in men's lives; but beyond and above these influences there remains the inscrutable element of personality, which we cannot grasp or explain, but which is a factor that can never be left out of account. In the divergence between the two sons of Isaac we have come upon the fundamental difference between man and man, the difference of character, displaying itself even in the details of a common life. For their fortunes the men themselves were responsible, not their surroundings. And it is here we find the clue to the meaning of their story.

2. 'I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau,' said the prophet. And yet few can read the story of the two brothers without being drawn to Esau rather than to Jacob. Indeed we may go further, and say that there is much in Jacob's character which will inspire every honest man with hearty dislike If our attention were confined to one side only of his strangely complex personality, a very strong case could be made out against him. It could be urged that in his greed, his untruthfulness, his cowardice, he presents a most unfavourable contrast to the brave, careless, high-spirited son of the desert whom he supplanted. To take advantage of a brother's weakness was bad indeed; to deprive him of his father's blessing by an act of deliberate treachery was worse. He was the true father of his race in his desire to make the best of both worlds. Laban, indeed, overreached him in the matter of his marriage; but it was not easy to supplant the supplanter. Before his service with Laban was at an end, Laban's sons had to confess: 'Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's.' His trickery being discovered, the face of Laban 'was not toward him as before.' He fled the country; but he did not forget to take with him all the possessions that he had gathered in the service of his father-in-law. And his fear when confronted with Esau after twenty years' estrangement only shows how little he understood the generous heart that he had wounded.

And yet it was this man that received the Divine benediction. This was the man who saw the vision of angels at Bethel, and the ladder that stretched from earth to heaven. This was the man consoled by God's messengers in his dangerous journey. This was the man whose spiritual agony gained for him the title *Israel*, 'he strove with God.' This was the man of whom a prophet dared to say in the name of the Most Holy, 'I loved Jacob.'[1]

3. It is worth our while to discover, if we may, wherein lay his superiority, moral and spiritual, to his more generous and large-hearted brother. Why did God regard Jacob with favour, but look on Esau with condemning eye?

(1) God loved Jacob for *his spiritual sensibility*. With all his grave and disfiguring defects there was in Jacob a sense of the unseen, and a conviction that God's blessing was worth more than all that life and time could give. He had the will to catch the accents of the voice of God, and to make response to His call. Down in his human heart, with all its subtle passions, there was this spiritual sensibility that made him accessible to the Spirit of God.

That is where Jacob stands in contrast to the earthly and sensuous charm of Esau. We are drawn, at the first glance, to admire a man like Esau. We recall his manly strength, his open, sunny face, his kindly and genial nature, his generous and accommodating temper. We can almost hear the ringing hail of his appealing voice as he greeted his fellows, and we can see him as he stood before Isaac, who loved him with a father's admiration. But the Scripture sets down Esau as 'a profane person.' A profane person, in Scripture, is a man with a contempt for things holy, an irreverent and ungodly spirit. He is the man whose soul is not thrilled by the thought of the presence of God, who has no mind for either God's worship or service.

¶ The Hebrews were never lacking in admiration of physical strength, agility, daring; and the sportsman had an undisputed place in a land abounding with the wild creatures of the chase. Ruddy, shaggy, brawny, fearless and impetuous, Esau was an ideal huntsman. But there was a serious flaw in his character. So much did he enjoy the warm, sensuous, earthy side of things that he had no thought of the awakening of the soul. He was a 'profane person,' not in the sense of taking God's name in vain—there is no suggestion of that—but in the sense of never feeling and recognizing God's claims upon him at all.[2]

¶ There are things in this life that no man has a right even to ridicule. I suppose the final definition of a profane man is simply that he can jest about holy things. There is no adjective except 'profane' to describe one who can barter in a farce such holy things as *love, marriage, sorrow, the soul, or God.* It is the quintessence of the secular mind that it can laugh about some things that are ultimately *serious.*[1]

It is not the stalwart athlete, with his virile energy, his genial charm and his sparkling jest, nor is it the man of brilliant mind with his intellectual force and vivid speech that God loves. However commanding the man may be, if he has no reverence for the eternal, no passion for purity, no quick response to the touch of God, he is merely a barbarian. God, like every other lover, regards those who are quick to make response and eager with desire, who will cry to Him even out of the depths of their sin, because their dominant passion is the passion for God. Our desires are always our most searching test.

For the lack of desire is the ill of all ills;
Many thousands through it the dark pathway
have trod.
The balsam, the wine of predestinate wills
Is a jubilant pining and longing for God.

(2) God loved Jacob for *his moral possibilities*. His ability and industry and foresight marked Jacob out as a man who had great ends in view, who could school himself to attain them. He cherished a tender and quenchless passion of pure affection for Rachel, and he exhibited an untiring devotion to his children. Above all, he held the faith of his fathers, and believed in the promise made to them, with an unfaltering steadfastness. But he was veined with faults. His greed, his quick eye for his own interests, his shrewd using of other men to advance his ambition were bound up with a lack of courage and of openness. His besetting sin, so strange in a man who believed in God, led him to think that he could best advance himself by his own craft. Beyond all doubt he is the most mixed man morally in Old Testament history. Yet within the soul of Jacob there was the power to become a child of God. He had the capacity for receiving God's messages, and a potentiality

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[1] J. H. Bernard, *Via Domini*, 229.

[2] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, ii. 17.

[1] J. Black, *An Apology for Rogues*, 52.

of rising on stepping-stones of his dead self to higher things.

To see what a man may become we should mark him at the close of his life. We are shown what Jacob was on his dying bed, and the story is one of the most moving scenes in Scripture. We see him as he lies, old, blind, awaiting the coming of death. Joseph brings in his two sons to receive the old man's blessing before the night will fall upon his life. Jacob puts his hands upon their head, and in his benediction reveals the secret of his soul. He does not give any wise counsels. He does not call up the past with any pride in his own achievement. He does not remind the kneeling youths of the future that lies before them and of its opportunities. His memory recalls only what God has been to him, and he speaks with adoring gratitude as he bestows his blessing, 'The angel, that redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads!'

Now we can understand why God loved Jacob. There is no love which is more unselfish than the love for a man who is achieving a high moral character in spite of hampering flaw and weakening defect. We understand George Eliot's couplet:

> I love the dear, imperfect things,
> I am not myself the finest Parian.

But there is a deeper and wiser affection than that tender sympathy for men as frail as ourselves. That is the love of God, who loves us not because of our faults and our frailties, but because He sees what we may become, and so deals with us, that we may be at length 'conformed to the image of His Son.'

¶ Life and character tend either upward or downward, but a single act or characteristic may not indicate the tendency of a life as a whole. You can make a saint out of the good qualities of bad men; you can make a devil out of the bad qualities of good men. Esau eclipsed Jacob at first, but his virtues were accidents, incidents, without roots, and they withered before the hot tests of life. Jacob outshone Esau at last. Day by day he fought his natural badness, and won in the hard struggle with himself. The mean supplanter Jacob became the hero Israel, a prince with God. Is it Thy will or my will be done? Are we living to please Christ or to please ourselves? Our answer to this question determines our life-current.[1]

(3) God loved Jacob for *his fitness to fufil His purpose.* What is God's supreme purpose so far as we can know it? It is to redeem a lost and ruined world by the revelation of His love and the sacrifice of Himself. It is to reconcile God and man in Christ Jesus. Behind His love and choice of Jacob there lay that Divine passion. He chose Jacob in spite of all his failing and wandering from truth and rectitude, because he could fulfil His great purpose. That is how wisdom, both in God and in man, always chooses its agents and instruments. We do not entrust a high office to a man of fleshly appetite or of frivolous mind. God marked these faults of Esau. He saw only a vagrant mind, a spirit akin to the heathen with whom Esau mingled. Therefore he loved Jacob.

Spiritual sensibility that makes quick response, and moral possibilities that can be schooled by discipline, mark all the men who are after God's own heart. But the man who will serve the great ends of His love and desire enters into the secret place of the Divine passion. Mark that in His dealing with His only begotten Son. Twice, and only twice, was the lover's confession heard from God's lips while Jesus ministered on the earth. When Jesus was being baptized, and in that hour was consecrated to His ministry and dedicated without reserve to God's service, there came that voice from heaven, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' Again, on the Mount of Transfiguration, when He saw the Cross before Him, and meekly accepted its anguish, and set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem, there came once more the voice from heaven, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' God's supreme love is for those who fulfil His redeeming purpose.[2]

A Searching Question

Mal. i. 8.—'Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee?'

1. In an age that had grown lax, and to consciences that had become sere, Malachi rings out a warning, not untouched by an acid sarcasm. The people of his time were not

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[1] M. D. Babcock.
[2] W. M. Clow, *The Evangel of the Strait Gate,* 189.

irreligious—at least they would have been surprised if you had told them that they were. But their plight was far worse. They were playing at religion. They made no conscience of these things either for themselves or for their children. They had got into the way of thinking that anything would do for God, so long as they kept up some kind of religious form. They were spending enormous sums upon their own selfish pleasures, and offering the fag-ends of their time and their means to the worship and the service of God. They didn't think what they were doing; or if they ever did think about it, they did not recognize the shabbiness of their conduct, or have the saving grace to blush at it. 'Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that you practically say to yourselves, The table of the Lord is contemptible. And when ye offer the blind for sacrifice, it is no evil! and when ye offer the lame and the sick, it is no evil! Oh no!' You detect the acid touch in the prophet's delicate sarcasm?

And what does he do next? Does he try to argue with them? Does he endeavour to remonstrate with those people who seemed to think that they could cheat Almighty God? No; he does something much subtler and infinitely more effective. They were living under an earthly governor to whom they had to make offerings from time to time as evidence of their vassalage, and in order to propitiate him and win his esteem and goodwill. Such were the circumstances which gave rise to the prophet's remark. You are giving God, he said, the fag-ends of your belongings. You are offering Him the live stock which you cannot use at your own table. 'Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee? or will he accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts.' The answer to the question may be filled in by each guilty conscience.

Look at things in this way, says Malachi. If you were anxious to secure the favour of some highly placed official, would you give as scant attention to him as you give to the Creator of all things? If you had a case to plead before some earthly tribunal, would you spend as little time upon the preparation of your brief as you do upon the petition you venture to bring before the Judge of all the earth? I'm not chiding you, says Malachi; I'm not blaming you; I'm not saying that you should do more than you have been doing. All I say is, Try it on the governor, and watch the results!

'Think not that I will accuse you to the Father,' said Jesus to the self-satisfied men of His day; 'there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust.' It is our own self-adopted standard of good form and ordinary decency that is going to witness against us at the last day. Against us who spend hours dressing and feeding these mortal bodies and grudge the minutes we spend upon the immortal souls which are one day to see the King in His beauty. Against us who pray, 'Thy kingdom come,' and do so little to advance it in China and Africa and India and at our own doors. Against us who say that we love God whom we have not seen, and go home and are scarcely civil to those whom we see every day.

2. But a great prophet never condemns without pointing out the way of deliverance. A skilful surgeon of the soul never plunges deep his scalpel without applying the healing ointments. So Malachi goes on: 'And now, I pray you, intreat the favour of God, that he may be gracious unto you.' And he shows these men that the approach of the soul to God has nothing to do with shams and pretence such as they had been practising in the name of Divine worship. 'For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name is great among the Gentiles—the unprofessing; and in every place incense is offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name is great among those who have never had your religious opportunities and privileges, saith the Lord of hosts.' There is far too much real need and actual suffering for anybody to play at prayer. For in every kind of place there are simple, seeking, devout souls upon whom the glory of God's universe has smitten so that they cannot keep from singing. It does not matter by what name they are called. God is too busy with people like that, says the prophet, to be put about by what you have the effrontery to call religion. In every place the sweetest incense is offered unto His name, and the purest of offerings. The loss is yours, and yours only, if you do not care to be of that high-hearted company.

¶ I shall never forget watching at a respectful, and, I hope, not a prying, distance the devotions of a Japanese woman in a Buddhist temple in Kobe. Of her agonized sincerity there was possible no more doubt than of one's existence. As I watched her I remembered my Scottish mother's word to me as a little boy, 'Never despise the gathering together of people for worship.'[1]

Religion, according to Malachi, was far too big, far too serious, far too happy and spontaneous a thing for any forced or unreal worship. There were far too many really hungry people pressing in to the King's table for Him to bother with those who had no sense of need. There were far too many sick thronging the consulting-room of the Great Physician for Him to see those who had no need of Him. You call this worship, this forced and unreal and irksome observance of times and seasons! Why, you would get far closer to the heart of God watching the lilies out in the fields; you would at least get a lesson in sincerity by listening to the feathered songsters pouring forth their notes of unaffected joy in the morning sunshine to the Giver of all.

3. Why do we gather for public worship week by week? It is in order that we may at least endeavour to tune ourselves to the Infinite. It is in order that, amid a welter of unrealities, we may seek Him who is the truth. If it is for nothing else, it is at least to try to re-live the chosen moments of human life, to escape from the trivialities of existence, and bathe our souls in the ocean of God's love. A great scholar has said that the method of intelligent and loving study is the only way of getting any sort of use out of, say, a work like one of Shakespeare's dramas. 'It is not quite true, but nearly true, to say that the value of *Romeo and Juliet* to any given man is exactly proportionate to the amount of loving effort he has spent in trying to re-live it. Certainly, without such effort *Romeo and Juliet* is without value and must die. It may stand at the door and knock, but its voice is not heard amid the rumble of the drums of Santerre. . . . The unwillingness to make imaginative effort is the prime cause of almost all decay of art. It is the caterer, the man whose business it is to provide enjoyment with the very minimum of effort, who is in matters of art the real assassin.'

¶ Millet writes: 'In art you have to give everything—body and soul.'

If that be true of the lower reaches of the spirit's striving, it is far more true of the highest flight of the spirit of man, when it seeks the face of God. Here also it is true that with what measure we mete it shall be measured to us again. The pearl of great price is the reward of a diligent search. It is never one among many: it is the one and only. If we really desire revival we must pray for it, we must work for it, we must live for it.

The Great Expectation

Mal. iii. 1.—'The Lord, whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant.'
Luke ii. 29, 30.—'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.'

1. THESE two texts join the last book of the Old Testament Canon with the first scenes of the New, and though far apart in time, they are united by one great expectation. Between them flowed four hundred years of tragic vicissitude, but that mighty hope, though often defeated and long delayed, still reigned. Like an arch of promise, it not only spanned that long period, but it became more spiritual, more luminous. Nothing in our human annals is more thrilling than the history of the Messianic hope in the Hebrew heart, forefelt in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New; the insight of faith which saw the day-star in the bosom of midnight and followed it through the ages.

¶ In the Boston Public Library Sargent has painted the history of the origin of religion, its dim beginnings in beast-worship, and the tangled maze of hopes and fears out of which dawned, slowly, the all-transfiguring vision of the one true God. How appealing the figure of the Hebrew slave at prayer, and how vivid the answer to his prayer when the hand of God is put forth from the Unseen to stay the arm of the despot—a hand expressive of vast and tender power! Below are the prophets, with Moses in the centre, ranging from the earliest seers who saw but dimly, to the latest singers who stand with shining faces and uplifted hand, expecting the coming of Christ.

All through the music of the prophets one hears a note of expectation, a grand and solemn optimism. However threatening the scene of national life, however terrible their denunciations of evil, those heroic souls kept their speech free from the poison of pessimism. Underneath all their eloquence lay the framework of a mighty faith: first, that which is not based upon justice must perish; second, God has revealed justice to His people; third, humanity should realize justice; and, finally, justice will be realized at last. The four principles of faith, the four invincible certitudes of prophecy, constituted its power, its passion, and its consolation. And the last of the four, it has been truly said, in equipping it with hope for all eternity, preserved it from the crushing influence of time with its deadening inertia and its depressing apostasies.

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[1] G. A. Johnston Ross, *Christian Worship and Its Future*, 21.

2. When we close the scroll of prophecy and open the Book of Fulfilment, how familiar is the scene before us! A peasant mother with her husband and child are climbing the steps of the Temple, bringing two turtle-doves as an offering of purification as she presents her babe before the Lord, according to the law and custom of her religion. It was a simple scene, such as one might have witnessed any day in the Temple. Learned scribes and haughty rulers knew not the meaning of that little group; they never do—such things are revealed only to such as keep a heart of child-like faith. But in every age, in every land, there are elect souls who watch for the Divine advent—as Emerson went about peeping into every cradle, looking for a Messiah—and in the Temple that day there were faithful hearts waiting for His coming. Simeon and Anna were there—two old people grown grey in hope, each of whom might have repeated the Browning lines:

> I am a watcher whose eyes have grown dim
> With looking for some star which breaks on
>   him,
> Altered and worn and weak and full of tears.[1]

Through the long years they waited, expecting each day to see the Chosen One appear, and ready to receive Him. Others rejected Him when He came, as we are apt to do, because He did not come as they thought He ought to come—as their creed said He would come—in startling splendour and conquering power. But those two old saints, wise with the wisdom that grows not old, knew the Messiah when He came in lowly garb, and welcomed Him with open arms. How unforgettable is the picture of the old man with the babe in his arms, his trembling voice breaking into a song of praise because he had lived to see the consolation of humanity, the Salvation of the Lord.

¶ The words of Simeon recall that scene at Ostia when Augustine and his mother sat in the window talking just before she passed to where, beyond this twilight, there is light. At last she said: 'My son, I have no further joy in life. What I do here, and why I remain here, I know not, now that the hope of this world has gone. One thing alone made me long to abide here for a little while, the desire to see thee a Catholic Christian ere I died. God hath granted me this more abundantly, in that I now see thee a servant of His, despising earthly bliss. What do I here?'

¶ In one of his letters, F. W. Robertson of Brighton observes that 'it would shed a kind of setting light and glory upon the death-beds of those whose aspirations have been high, and whose work is done in this world, if, as they go out of it, they could see some such hope for the race coming in—as at the dawn of a former salvation, hearts old and worn with hopeless expectation cried, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."'

3. Surely this is the lesson that we need to-day—the lesson, that is, that truth comes to those who expect it, watch for it, pray for it. 'Truth,' says Lorne Pierce, 'is an emperor that only comes to visit his subjects along the highway of great longing. Science advances to its kingdom along the avenues of expectancy. Religion comes into its own along the road of loving hearts, that great-hearted clan of intrepid believers.'

It is fatally easy to-day to repeat the cynical beatitude, as if its wisdom were equal to its wit: Blessed is he that does not expect anything, for he shall not be disappointed. Only those who are truly wise and have a heart for great adventure obey the beatitude, so deeply engraved in the annals of English faith: Expect great things of God, attempt great things for God. Here is the true faith, which sees in the confusion of the times foregleams of a greater and better to-morrow. It dares to pray for the coming of the Kingdom, not in words only, but also, and much more, in works, watching for it the while as those who wait for the morning.

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[1] *Pauline.*

(1) We must live expectantly as to the future of the Church, now so baffled and sorely tried. Never were the critics of the Church more relentless. They tell us that its arm-chair theology was knocked to pieces in the rough and tumble of the world-war. Troubled by the strident rebukes of the man in the street, many are seeking after 'messages' and 'restatements,' and even 'apologies,' but to no avail. Yet there are signs of a better day, despite many dismal predictions. There is a passion for reality, and a yearning for a deeper, more experimental fellowship in which old schisms shall be healed. There is a longing for prophetic leadership, and above all, and through all, a desire to realize great social and democratic ideals under spiritual influences. Many humiliations are teaching us humility, and we may yet learn that the Church does not rest upon creed or ritual, but upon Christ its Lord and Leader.

One thing is clear, if there is to be revival of faith and renewal of vision, it will come to those who expect it, who are praying for it and watching for it. Meantime, our business is to seek the mind of Christ, that so we may make the things of the spirit a kingdom of realities here and now in the lives we live on earth. The Church does not exist to do everything, but to do the one thing without which nothing else is worth doing. If it is in any worthy sense the Body of Christ, it must be a union of those who love in the service of those who suffer, and thus 'organize God's light.'

(2) There is, however, a profounder expectation and appeal in this theme to every follower of Him who came as a babe to the Temple. The deepest desire of the Christian heart, its holiest longing, is to realize Christ, not as a hero in history, not as a figure moving amid the shadow of ideas, but as a Living Presence. Dale, Bushnell and Tauler tell us how they read about Christ, argued about Him, brooded over His truth for years, and one day at the corner of the street, so to speak, they met Him in a new, more intimate, more revealing fellowship—like the disciples at Emmaus. Then they went back to the familiar pages of the Gospels and found them radiant with a light that never was on sea or land. Shall we ever know that assurance? Now we see through a glass darkly, shall we ever see the Living Truth face to face? Shall we ever know that which is now hinted to us in signs, symbols, sacraments? Yes, if we are faithful and expectant.

(3) There remains the great expectation of eternal life, the ancient, high, heroic faith of humanity. To-day it is not simply a wistful yearning, but an eager, insistent longing for reunion with those torn from us in those days when death seemed to divide divinity with God. And not with them only, but with all those who left us in the long ago, taking our hearts with them when they went away. Is faith a dream? Nay, but the lack of it a dream. Aspiration is not mocked; God is not the God of the dead, but of those who are alive for evermore. He who filled our hearts with the hauntings of an eternal to-morrow will not leave us in the dust. In Him we live here and hereafter, and because He lives we shall live also.

Lord, where Thou art our happy dead must be;
  Unpierced as yet the Sacramental Mist,
But we are nearest them when nearest Thee
  In solemn Eucharist.

Lord, we crave for those gone home to Thee,
  For those who made our earthly homes so fair;
How little may we know, how little see,
  Only that Thou art there.

Dear hands, unclasped from ours, are clasping Thine,
  Thou holdest us forever in Thy heart;
So close the one Communion—are we
  In very truth apart?

Lord, where Thou art our blessed dead must be,
  And if with Thee, what then their boundless bliss!
Till Faith is sight, and Hope reality,
  Love's anchorage is this!

The Refining Fire

Mal. iii. 3.—'He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.'

THIS is a beautiful and not uncommon figure of speech in Scripture. The Psalmist, the wise man, and the prophet have all made use of it. It refers to the process by which silver is separated from the impurities with which it is intermixed when the ore is dug out of the earth. The precious metal is very rarely found unalloyed with other substances; and the work of the refiner is to free it from these. This he does by heating the ore mixed with lead in a crucible, and blowing air upon it, until the lead is oxidized, and the films of lead oxide which rise to the surface are all removed. The refiner sits and watches the process closely, keeping the heat at the proper degree and the air-current playing. Then the colour becomes clearer and clearer as the impurities disappear, and the pure metallic silver is left in all its beauty. At this stage the refiner must watch most carefully as the silver is injured if it remain too long. But he knows when the process is finished, because he sees his own face reflected in the silver he is looking down upon.

1. The preacher who gave us this telling illustration knew what he was doing; he could not have used an apter figure of life as we know it in relation to God. He does, indeed, 'sit like a refiner and purifier of silver,' and it is we who are being purified from earthly alloy that we may be fitted for heavenly habitations. Nor will He cease from the process till, as He intently watches the emerging soul of the individual and the race, He can see His own image reflected therein with a clearness to which nothing more needs to be added. Then we shall be ready to take our place in the eternal kingdom of blessedness and joy, precious workmanship wrought and fashioned by the hand of Christ.

The words as they stand in Malachi meant that God's judgments would remove all wicked people from the body politic, and leave only those who were Israelites indeed; but we are thinking rather of such a purification of human nature itself as will render it a fitting expression of the life and love eternal. But these two points of view are not inconsistent with each other. Malachi does say that the whole nation will have to pass through the refiner's fire and be purified by much suffering before it is ready for its higher vocation, although when the process is complete only the righteous will be left. All evil institutions are to be overthrown, all wicked practices discontinued, and justice and truth exalted in their place. What is this but to say that righteous and unrighteous alike are to be subjected to the cleansing fires of pain and, presumably, that some of the latter will be won from their evil ways and made to take life more seriously and nobly? This is exactly what we are trying to bring out, but we would look at the matter on a wider scale than that of the life of any nation or, indeed, of any experience which is only of this world. The soul of man, individually and in the lump, needs to be reclaimed from its subjection to material conditions, and its essential Divinity made fully manifest, perfectly reflecting the face of God, ere it is ready for the fulfilment of its eternal destiny. The question arises why the precious metal of our spiritual being should ever have had to be alloyed with baser substances and dug out of the earth. Why could not the silver of our being have been found in its purity in the first place without any admixture of the sordid and sinful elements appertaining to life in the flesh? For the analogy really is remarkably close between the silver of Malachi's figure and the history of the human race on this earth so far as we know it. The earliest we know of ourselves is that, like the rest of the sentient creation, our origin is of the dust and the clay. Our beginnings were anything but glorious; our ancestry appears to have been identical with that of things which crawl and things which sting and tear, things of fang and talon. There is nothing more illustrious in our pedigree, if we go back far enough, so far as this world is concerned, than in that of the hog and the gorilla. We have been quarried from the same mine. The question is, Why has it ever been so? The precious metal must have been there from the first all right, or it would never have shown itself at all; but why has it been buried so deep? Why has the ore been like that of all other earthly beings; and why have its constituents been so evil, so degrading, so unlike what one might have expected, considering the Divine beauty and grandeur which have since been made manifest from time to time, especially in our Lord Jesus Christ, through the medium of human souls? We do not know. The nearest one can come to a glimpse of the purpose of it all is that there was no other way of allowing good to become manifest under its sublimer aspects. 'We have the treasure in earthen vessels,' but it is a treasure all the same. Our good may be very deep, but it is there, and had it never been buried in the flesh could never have shown itself for what it is.

Crowning the glory revealed is the glory that
crowns the revealing.

The soul has needed the body, the spiritual the material, to declare itself; but when its object is gained, and the struggle over, the fruits will remain.

When an artist wishes to cast a bronze, he first makes a model of his subject in clay, lets it harden, then coats it over with plaster, and lets that harden, too. This done, he scoops out the clay and pours in molten metal to fill the place it occupied. When the metal has cooled he breaks off the plaster, and nothing remains but the statue or bust he wishes to produce; the bronze in its molten stage has taken on the exact form imposed by the plaster, which in its turn has been shaped by the clay. God is doing much the same with our spirits, and that is why they have had to be imprisoned and repressed in an earthly environment and bodies of death.

2. God's way of freeing the soul of His child from the domination of the things of this world often has to be by the discipline of disappointment, sorrow, and pain. This is the way in which the soul sheds its illusions, breaks through its limitations, and gets rid of its impurities. This is what the seers of the Old Testament discovered, that sorrows, if bravely met, soften our nature and attune it to melodies not heard before. How often we hear one of them saying that he is a much better man now that God has plunged him into the deep waters of sorrow than he used to be when he had no troubles. When they recall the things that vexed them and filled them with envy they have no words to express their joy at being set free from poverty and paltriness of spirit. They confirm our own experience that, while pleasures leave only faint traces on the surface of the soul, our conflicts, our cries, our storm and stress teach us the truth that is life. Hence the lesson learned by living—that we can never find or receive the greatest truths until sorrow has made us tender and humble of heart.

¶ Suffering, says Tagore, has driven man with his prayer to knock at the gate of the infinite in him, the divine, thus revealing his deepest instinct, his unreasoning faith in the reality of the ideal—the faith shown in the readiness for death, in the renunciation of all that belongs to the self.

The dark-brown mould's upturned
By the sharp-pointed plow—
And I've a lesson learned.

My life is but a field,
Stretched out beneath God's sky
Some harvest rich to yield.

Where grows the golden grain?
Where faith? Where sympathy?
In a furrow cut by pain.

3. At times it seems as if some of the very best and noblest of the servants of the Most High have to bear more of affliction than their fellows instead of less. Looking upon some brave and unselfish but sorely tried and harassed life, we have said, Why this man or this woman more than others? Surely such as they need no chastisement; no evil needs to be burnt out of them; they are not rebelling against the will of God, but trying to fulfil it; if ever any deserved well of His bounty, surely they do. Yes, perhaps so; but the great refiner and purifier knows better than we what alloy needs to be removed from their goodness before it is the perfect reflection of His own; or, what is quite as probable, their sufferings may be like the sufferings of Christ, a means whereby the soul of the race is being rescued from its evil and reunited to the eternal source of all that is true and abiding.

¶ Maarten Maartens, in one of his stories,[1] lets light into some of the darkest corners of life. Out of the wreck of faith and hope and home—three hearts ravaged by misery, sorrow and fear—Herman wins a theodicy, in spite of the awful dogma that all suffering is proof of sin: 'Them's not punishments. It's teachings. To make us love and understand each other.

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[1] *Herman Pols.*

And pity. Teachings that give us hearts. Before last night I hadn't an idea people could love so much! And be so sorry for each other's guilt.'

There is a sermon, too, in the book, one passage of which lingers in memory. The text is, 'If he ask for bread, will he give him a stone?' and the answer reads like a page from the life of the writer—a page blotted with tears.

'Still bread,' cried the preacher, 'though ye deem it a stone in the giving! Still bread, though it bruise your hands and though it break your teeth! Bread of life, for ye asked, and the Father hath given it! Bread of life, in the end, whatsoever it may seem to you now, in the eating! Still bread, not a stone! Do you dare to take this thing that the Father hath sent you, this trouble, this bereavement, this unbearable affliction—do you dare, you poor mortal, to spread it out in God's presence—to say, "Father, I asked Thee! I asked Thee! Thou hast given me a stone!" Do you dare?'[1]

Thou Life within my life, than self more near,
Thou veilèd Presence infinitely clear,
From all illusive shows of sense I flee,
To find my centre and my rest in Thee.

The Pressure of God's Spirit

Mal. iii. 10.—'Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.'

1. It is not an uncommon thing to hear the expression 'I never had a chance,' and as we think of the man's environment and his heredity it gives us thought. But there is some one else who never had a chance in the lives of innumerable men and women, and that some one else is God. We argue that God's power is irresistible and He can make His chances. But that is one thing He never does. 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock' is the mystical saying of our Lord, and He waits. Having made free beings to have fellowship with, that freedom could not be overborne by omnipotence. So we have to make a way for His entrance.

We know, however, that God is not indifferent for all His apparent quietness, but is exerting His power behind the outward appearance of things. There is no place in human life where the Divine power is not actually held back and, as it were, banked up. There is no place in all our human experience where the possibilities of the unrestrained and free-acting Spirit of God do not far exceed anything yet effected through the openings we have afforded in our personal or national life. This is indeed what we mean when we say that the world could have been far more Christian if only men had been more willing. God has given us freedom of choice, and we have used that freedom in such a way that we frequently deny Him room to work out all His blessed will.

We must at times have been impressed by the abundant resource and power of Nature. All that Nature seems to require is a vacant space, and then she immediately begins to pour in her reserves, as we saw in a single season when the wide acres of devastated France were reclothed in green. But it is the same in almost every direction. During the War we were all interested in the doings of our navy. We were given to understand that the fleet was not out upon the high seas, but lying with steam up in some cunningly chosen harbour, ready to take to sea at an instant's notice. There was a pressure of about 200 lb. of steam in the boilers. Now suppose, in a case like that, it were possible to make a very small pin-hole into the boilers where the steam was under that immense pressure. What would happen? Only a thin feather dancing round the pin-hole with a gentle hissing whistle to indicate the terrific force within—a force sufficient to drive a mighty battleship into action. But enlarge the outlet and make it but half an inch across, and in a moment the whole engine-room will be untenable. All it needed was rather more than the smallest opportunity.

2. It would appear that in all ages, and especially in the Bible, men of a certain type of mind and heart have actually perceived this power behind the world. Thus Malachi says: 'Bring ye the tithes into the storehouse and test me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive.' The Old Testament prophet is overwhelmed with the marvellous fullness of Divine grace and

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[1] J. Fort Newton.

the possibilities that lie immediately behind mankind. 'Bring ye the tithes,' he says. 'Make but a little opening,' he means. Only do the little bit that is your part, and then ye shall see the power and feel the blessing.

St Paul cannot find words in the whole of the Greek language with which to express his conception of the power of God, and he has no alternative but to resort in places to incongruities of metaphor, which nevertheless are most appropriate. Thus he speaks of 'the unsearchable riches of Christ,' and 'to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.' And again he says, 'He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.' Thus St Paul gives us the substance of the matter. He, too, knows of the windows of heaven of which Malachi speaks. He, too, knows of that ceaseless pressure that streams through every pore of the universe. And the saints of God throughout the world have known all about it. They have, indeed, been able to exhibit so much consecration and so much power in their lives, not because of extraordinary mental ability, but because they have given themselves to be orifices of the Divine Spirit and channels of Divine grace.

¶ Tired and overwrought by the strain of a series of evangelistic meetings, Stanley Jones tells us that one day after one of the services he went out and lay down under an apple tree, thoroughly exhausted. 'The beautiful Virginia apples were hanging on the tree above me. The Master came to me and seemed to say, "My child, you're tired, aren't you?" "Yes," I replied; "I have a right to be, for I've worked hard." "And you are out of patience, aren't you?" "Yes, I am," I replied; "but I think I have a right to be when they are so dull and unresponsive." "Do you see this tree?" said the Master. "How is it bringing forth fruit? Is it working itself up into a strain and frenzy in order to produce fruit?" "No," I said; "it seems to be just quietly pouring its life through the branches into the apples and they are becoming beautiful and ripe." He quietly replied, "You are in Me, as the branch in the vine. Keep the channels open, let My life flow through you into the fruit, and it will be abundant." I arose with a new sense of trust and inward poise and calm. I need worry no more about the results. I would simply keep open the channels for Life to flow. Service was no longer a strain, but a joy. And the fruit was now more abundant, for it was not mine, but His.'

3. From this point of view we can see a further significance in some of the beatitudes, for instance, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' How shall they see God? Not as a calm image in the distant skies, taking satisfaction in the prayers and praises of men. The pure in heart see God as an intense fire in the soul. They feel Him as a surging, throbbing, vitalizing personality that transforms the world. But why is it the pure in heart only that see God? And the answer is, 'Because the pure in heart are pure.' Because they alone are unchoked channels of Divine grace. That is ultimately what purity implies—that the way is clear along which the Spirit of God acts.

From this point of view also we can well understand why we seem to have so little evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit in even slight degree, to say nothing of His overwhelming power. Let us ask ourselves frankly of what sort are the openings for the Divine action in our personal life. Is not the great power of God behind us individually only to be detected through pin-holes in our character? Thus we cannot see the evidences that we might otherwise expect. Our passions not only blind our eyes from seeing God, but they choke up the channels through which His energy would otherwise flow. Our selfish pride; our double motives; our sneaking desire to be found out when we have done a good turn quietly; our chronic preference for sitting on the moral fence till we can jump off on the side of the bigger crowd; our respect for force and wealth and title and reputation apart from consideration of moral values—does not all this betray a soul choked up with impurity. We lack what the Scriptures call 'singleness of eye' and what we call moral principle or moral courage. We need much more of the spirit of those who are willing to be persecuted for Christ's sake. How can we expect to comprehend the full loveliness of the Holy Presence and the sacred touch, when these things are only too true?

4. All these facts bring us back to the simplest and most fundamental things of the Christian

life. As Christian people we are not only to know God truly and to worship Him sincerely, but also to afford an instrument to God; to offer our souls as a way and a means for Him to work out His blessed will. We must be labourers together with Christ. That is surely why He made us in His own image. If we would learn the fullness of the Divine blessing we must get to work. God is seldom found very near to those who are spiritually lazy. He can do more through one consecrated man, whose hands are already full and whose eyes already droop with weariness, than through ten men whose hands are empty and whose hearts are cold.

If we could only get into touch and harmony with the Divinely simple things, and were brave enough to consecrate our heart and soul to Him, the deeds of God in human life would far outstrip all our present experience. God presses behind the world at every point, but behind the soul He is mightiest of all. 'Test me,' saith the Lord of Hosts.

The Old and the New

Mal. iv. 5, 6.—'Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.'

1. The age in which the prophet lived was one of pronounced religious indifference. It was an age, too, of cynical scepticism. The Jewish State was far from flourishing, and it seemed to many a discontented mind that the Divine Ruler of the Universe made no distinction between the virtuous and the wicked. In these circumstances Malachi comes forward and seeks to recall the people to religious and moral earnestness. The regenerating work which was being accomplished by Ezra and Nehemiah he endeavours to enforce by his prophetical admonitions. He preaches the need, and holds out the hope, of a great spiritual reformation which will restore the Divine worship to its former place in the affections of the people, at the same time that it will bring about a better recognition of the social duties that men owe to one another. This need and hope are figuratively expressed in the words of the text.

We may catch Malachi's meaning if we bear in mind that Elijah was the great religious reformer of antiquity. It was his zeal that brought about the downfall of the worship of Baal in Samaria. It was he who recalled apostate Israel to the service of God. That was the main work of his life. For the rest, his career is shrouded in obscurity. Long after the Biblical story of his life was written down, Elijah continued to be the central figure of Jewish legend. It was believed that, as he had never actually died, he would appear again upon earth as the forerunner of the Messiah. He would herald the approach of the Jewish millennium. To some such popular notion Malachi would seem to be referring when he speaks of the mission of Elijah which is to precede the great and awful day of the Lord, when virtue will triumph over wickedness, and God's Kingdom will be established upon earth. But we must always be careful not to interpret the prophets too literally. What Malachi probably means is not that Elijah himself would reappear, but that there would arise some great religious leader imbued with the reforming zeal of an Elijah. It does not matter who this leader is to be, it is the character of his work which is important. He is to bring about a spiritual revival, and he is to turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to the fathers. What does this mean? Malachi is deploring the religious estrangement which had grown up between the generation of his day and their pious forefathers. Observing that the age in which he lives regards the religious observances inherited from olden times with contempt, he conceives that the mission of a religious reformer would consist in bringing about a reconciliation between the spirit of the past and the spirit of the present, between the heart of the fathers, intent upon conserving everything that was ancient, and the heart of the children, eager for everything that was new and modern. It was impossible to expect that the Temple worship of olden times could be reproduced in all its former glory. The age of Ezra and Nehemiah was not the age of Solomon. New circumstances had arisen, and they had to be taken into account. So while Malachi appeals to his contemporaries to manifest a spirit of loyalty to the past, he recognizes that the past must also make concessions to the present. There must be mutual toleration if a religious revival is to be brought about, if the

Jewish State is to be preserved from the blighting curse of indifference.

2. We, too, stand in need of a religious revival. We live in an age when men withhold from the Sanctuary the reverence due to it. We have to deplore a widespread—some would say, a growing—disregard of ancient observances. The old, cynical question repeats itself in our day: *Cui bono?* What profit is there in serving God after the manner of our ancestors? That is one side of the religious problem which confronts us. On the other, we see men so wedded to the past that they are altogether out of sympathy with the present. They cannot, or they will not, bring themselves to realize that each age has its own religious wants which it may wish to satisfy in its own way. There has thus sprung up an estrangement between those who represent the spirit of the past and those who manifest the spirit of the present. The hearts of the fathers are turned *from* the children, and the hearts of the children are turned *from* the fathers.

¶ We have an example of this alienation in such a book as Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son.* Though the father, in that frank and painful human document, was kind in heart he was narrow in opinion. As the child grew to manhood, his views changed with the changing years. The father grew narrower: the son grew broader. A breach occurred one night when, at the Plymouth Brethren's meeting which they attended, a member got up and denounced Shakespeare as a godless play-actor now enduring the tortures of the lost. An open rupture was the result, and the son closes the sad record with the words, 'After my long experience, I have surely the right to protest against the untruth that evangelical religion is a desirable adjunct to human life. It divides heart from heart . . . it invents virtues which are sterile and cruel; it invents sins which are no sins at all, but which darken the heaven of innocent joy with futile clouds of remorse.'

3. To effect a reconciliation between these conflicting tendencies, to adapt the old to the new and the new to the old, that must be the work of every religious reformer, of every one in whom the Elijah-spirit of zeal still lives. It is not wise to sigh for the return of old times. For good or for evil, those times have vanished; they can never be recalled. It is not even desirable that they should be brought back. Times change, and we change with them.

¶ When you sail away to other lands you don't expect to find the peoples in those countries closely approximating to our ways at home. They have their own customs. No more can you with reason hope that a new age will look at things as did the one before it. All missionaries tell us that eastern Christians can never reproduce our western Christianity; that they too must think out the Lord for themselves—'their Lord,' as Paul says in his catholic-hearted way, 'no less than ours'; must come to Him on their own feet, must look at Him through their own eyes. And each new generation must be given that same liberty. There is indeed no need of giving. It itself claims and takes that as a primary right.[1]

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world
Comfort thyself.

Religion is a living thing. It must develop with our mental growth, and its development must reflect the changes that have been brought about in our social and material circumstances. This does not mean that God's truth changes, or that the great fundamental doctrines of God's revelation change. They do not. They are there, eternal verities. But the mode of giving expression to them must vary with the temporal and local conditions under which we live.

¶ A recent writer has said, 'The only thing we can be sure of is that the Christianity of the future will not be exactly that of the past, and yet will not disavow its essential features. The old is always dying and the new being born, but there is no breach of continuity. The new could not be born except of the old, and the old gives evidence of life, not of death, by being transformed into the new.'

¶ I have heard that sometimes in Wales and other places where artists gather in great numbers, a small bit of scenery is selected, and one man is set to paint it from one position, and another from another, and a third from a third, and when the three pictures are finished it is wonderful to see how all of them—pictures of the same bit of scenery—are so different. Each has the same scene, and each sees it a little differently. Each puts into his picture the same bit of landscape, but he also puts into it quite unconsciously the position from which he sees it. So the pictures are different. The same scene with the difference of place put in.[1]

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[1] A. J. Gossip, *The Hero in thy Soul*, 56.

4. You will notice what it is that Malachi in his day longed for—not a turning of heads to each other, but a turning of hearts. He asks for sympathy, not exact similarity of thought. And there is no limit to the results that can be reached, to the difficulties that can be removed, when hearts begin to feel after and find each other. God Himself found no other way to win men but the way of coming inside human life. He must know and understand the human heart by Himself wearing a human heart. This is the way of the Incarnation. So God in Christ wins men. Men to-day confess it—sometimes in unexpected quarters. Only a God who shares human experiences from within can control and guide men's hearts. And here is the lesson for us. God's method must be our method. What He did in His great love to win men we must in our measure try to do to win others. We have to try and get inside each other's hearts, patiently, perseveringly—the old into the heart of the young, the young of the old.

There were old people — Elisabeth and Zacharias, Simeon and Anna, the Wise Men—who gathered round the Child who was born to be the Light of the world. The Light was new, and they were old. But because they had kept fresh hearts they were ready for new things. And so they stand for ever on the pages of the Christian story and on the canvas of Christian art as those who welcomed the Light and ushered in the world's great Hope. And wherever there are to-day older people who are fresh in heart and sympathies, the kind of people to whom the younger talk naturally of new plans and hopes, it is impossible to exaggerate the contribution these make to the promise of the future. And, on the other hand, there was the Boy Jesus, His heart and mind full of such aspirations and hopes as never stirred the heart and mind of human boy, yet He went down to Nazareth and was subject to those whose claim upon Him of age and experience He recognized. And there, too, we may find our reminder that no aspirations of a younger generation ever come to sound and fruitful issues which have disregarded the experiences, or even the prejudices, of the older generation. To Him then—Teacher of young and old—let us ever turn for inspiration, light, and guidance. For the Perfect Love has in His keeping the secret of sympathy, and He can in very deed turn the heart of the fathers to the children and of the children to their fathers, and help each to use for the harmonious and progressive service of God and man 'the gifts which both have according to the grace given unto them.'

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[1] T. M. Lindsay, *College Addresses*, 115.

THE MINOR PROPHETS

COMMENTARIES FOR REFERENCE

(1) Expositor's Bible: G. A. Smith, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, 1898 (and later editions). Those who wish to study the Prophetic writings in more detail will probably find this the most helpful and suggestive work.

(2) Cambridge Bible: Cheyne's commentaries on *Hosea* and *Micah* were done many years ago but they are by no means superseded. H. C. O. Lanchester has edited *Obadiah* and *Jonah*, and adapted to the text of the Revised Version S. R. Driver's commentary on *Joel* and *Amos*, and A. B. Davidson's on *Nahum*, *Habakkuk* and *Zephaniah*. *Haggai*, *Zechariah*, and *Malachi* are done by W. Emery Barnes.

(3) Century Bible: R. F. Horton contributed an introduction to the first six of the Twelve Prophets (*Hosea* to *Micah*), while the treatment of the last six (*Nahum* to *Malachi*) is by S. R. Driver.

(4) Peake's Commentary: The Minor Prophets have been dealt with by a number of scholars—*Hosea* by G. H. Box, *Joel* by W. L. Wardle, *Amos* by Maurice A. Canney, *Obadiah* and *Micah* by H. Wheeler Robinson, *Jonah* by A. S. Peake, *Nahum*, *Habakkuk* and *Zephaniah* by A. R. Gordon, *Haggai* and *Zechariah* by R. H. Kennett, *Malachi* by A. J. Grieve.

(5) International Critical Commentary: In this series the commentaries on *Amos* and *Hosea* are the work of W. R. Harper. J. M. P. Smith completed Harper's commentary on *Micah* and wrote those on *Nahum*, *Zephaniah*, and *Malachi*. J. A. Bewer undertook *Obadiah*, *Joel*, and *Jonah*; H. G. Mitchell, *Haggai* and *Zechariah*; and W. H. Ward, *Habakkuk*. A full record of the opinions of scholars and commentators on the Minor Prophets will be found in these volumes.

(6) In the Westminster Commentary Edgehill's *Amos* has been revised and completed by G. A. Cooke. The most recent commentary on *Amos* is that by R. S. Cripps (S.P.C.K., 1929).

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